

# Constructing the 'Student Experience':

## Placing University Students in the Entrepreneurial City

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## Abstract

### Constructing the 'Student Experience': Placing University Students in the Entrepreneurial City

A better understanding of how groups create a sense of place in the urban environment gives insights into implications of entrepreneurial strategies and divisive cultures there. In this thesis, I study university students who have been conceptualised as a group that is powerful in influencing and shaping their urban surroundings. In particular, I explore how they develop a relationship to the university city via an analysis of the case of Liverpool. By analysing the notion of the 'student experience' as it is employed by the participants of this research, I aim to emphasise the importance of place in learning and practicing what it means to be a student.

In this thesis, I adopt a methodological framework from social constructionism and empirical phenomenology building on the understanding that what can be studied about the social world is how it appears to people and how they construct their own realities. In the attempt to get close to the lifeworlds of the students who took part in this research, I employ the methods of autophotography, photo-elicitation and walking interviews to investigate the significance of the urban fabric in which people's practices are embedded in. A frame analysis approach inspired by Erving Goffman is established as a tool to analyse spoken and spatial data in a way that is sensitive to what people do and the layers of meaning in which they make sense of these practices.

My analysis suggests that students' relationship to the city is characterised by the enactment of a typification with regard to categorical knowledge of what it means to be a student. The 'student experience' is a social, spatial and aspirational category which students aim to achieve through particular practices and their enactment in specific urban spaces. Students' engagement with the university city is interpreted as a collective practice in which urban space is used as a marker of distinction, not just towards non-student populations but also relative to different cohorts of students. Student culture is characterised by rigid membership criteria contingent on a partial engagement with the university city. Overall, I situate this bounded type of engagement with the city within the context of the university in which different years of study imply changing ways of identifying as students and as such implicate changes in how students use and make sense of urban space.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Parts of the red brick façade have fallen off, revealing large patches of light brown insulation panels, visibly exposing the only decorative function of the brick frontage. This is not an old building that might show signs of age and decay but the bricks have fallen off only months after the building was opened for business in September 2015. The building is situated on Liverpool's Hope Street, a road that is characterised by its Georgian heritage and Grade II listed buildings. It is home to the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall and the Everyman Theatre, it connects the city's two cathedrals and it increasingly sees a growing entertainment infrastructure of cafes, bars and restaurants on and around it. The fallen bricks are part of a new-built student accommodation development that houses over 300 university students in two L-shaped blocks and is reaching up to nine storeys (Liverpool City Council, 2017b). In the attempt to find out more about the brick façade, I entered a maze of planning applications and associated documents to trace the complex network of companies that were involved in this development. In this quest, I ended back up with the collapse of the Soviet Union and an American equity company that capitalised on the fall of this political regime and economy. The bricks are a small example of how international flows of capital can impact upon a particular place. They also remind us how the specific local context is crucial to understanding urban environments and the conflicts and divisions within.

I begin the story in Liverpool's Hope Street and the stages involved in planning and finishing this particular student accommodation development whose fallen façade stands in strong contrast to the construction company's description of the development as a "'flagship' scheme of high quality design, materials and landscaping" (Liverpool City Council, 2017e: 8). In 2012, Liverpool City Council received planning application 12F/2475 proposing the development of student accommodation, some commercial retail units, an enclosed public square, and the relocation of a local statue to the site. The application was contingent on the



**Figure 1.1. Student Accommodation on Liverpool's Hope Street (The images included in this thesis are my own unless a different authorship is stated specifically).**

demolition of 19<sup>th</sup> century Josephine Butler House and surrounding parking facilities (Waddington, 2013; Liverpool City Council, 2017b). Although several organisations and administrators such as United Utilities, Environmental Health Managers and Highway Managers had no objections to the proposed development, it received strong opposition from neighbouring institutions and residents. Several councillors argued that the size and quality of the building is out of scale with the local context, with one councillor pointing out that the design constitutes “an unimaginative mass, resembling barracks that will detract from the historic significance of the area” (Liverpool City Council, 2017d: 4). The criticism that the scale of the student accommodation clashes with its low-rise residential surroundings resonated with local residents who had joined the consultation and were concerned that the population diversity was at stake with more and more student blocks being developed in close proximity, a concern that was supported by other neighbourhood organisations.

However, it was not just the scale and purpose of the development that sparked criticism but particularly also its design was critiqued to be out of keeping with the historic neighbourhood by organisation such as English Heritage or the Rodney Street

Association. The latter stated that it constitutes a “monstrous development that is out of scale and context with the site and its surroundings with an appearance more in-keeping with post-war Bucharest or Minsk rather than with Liverpool’s Hope Street” (Liverpool City Council, 2017d: 5). Although representatives of the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, a direct neighbour of the development, welcomed the plan to offer more retail units for independent businesses in its direct proximity, they were critical of the building’s supposed scale and design, specifically pointing out that the “façade treatments and materials are not of sufficient quality to warrant the building’s prominent position” (Liverpool City Council, 2017d: 5). Little did they know back then that the mentioned façade would cause far more problems than anticipated.

When a planned development is criticised for its scale, design and purpose arguably there is not much substance left to it that could be translated into a building. Yet, despite the opposition from some of the mentioned residents and organisations, a divisional planning manager from Liverpool City Council came to an entirely positive conclusion about this development. The proposed student accommodation block does not just support the objective of increasing the residential population of the city centre but the “understated design” will “directly enhance the significance of local heritage assets” and constitutes a valuable contribution to Liverpool’s visitor economy while also improving its employment rate (Liverpool City Council, 2017:d 15). In February 2013, the scheme’s planning application was approved conditionally and praised for “facilitating the efficient reuse of an urban brownfield site” (Liverpool City Council, 2017c: 11). Most of the conditions attached to this approval concerned generic aspects of construction planning such as a required construction site management plan or a contamination investigation. However, due to the prominent location of the development, which also sits inside the buffer zone of Liverpool’s World Heritage Site, the city council requested to see samples of materials for instance, of the facing, and later they approved the use of the “MatClad Custom Blend Roman length hand-made Clay Bricks” (Liverpool City Council, 2017a, 2017c).

The conflict that played out in the planning phase of this specific student accommodation development is symptomatic of the concerns of various urban groups with regard to the presence of large student populations and the

establishment of infrastructure that caters for them. The concerns that were voiced by the residents and organisations in the case of the Hope Street development are frequent complaints that are made about student accommodation. Most commonly it is the quality of the construction and the materials, the architectural design and its fit into the immediate environment and the scale of the development that are critiqued. These concerns emphasise the underlying fear that neighbourhoods become residentially unbalanced and are dominated by their student populations. All sorts of assumptions and prejudice about the supposed negative effects of the presence of student populations in neighbourhoods are inherent in these concerns which ultimately point at broader issues of segregation and divisions in urban settings. Cities are shaped by their student populations socially but also spatially and the development of student accommodation shows the conflict potential of this dynamic.

### 1.1. From Liverpool to the Soviet Union

In returning to the specific student accommodation development on Liverpool's Hope Street, when 'following the bricks' another narrative of urban politics and economy unfolds. Walking around in Liverpool suggests that the city increasingly attracts large-scale developers who buy patches of urban land in the city centre for the development of purpose-built student accommodation (from now on PBSA). Often these come in the shape of securitised and gated tower blocks containing studios and multiple-bedroom apartments. The student accommodation building on Hope Street is only one of several recent accommodation developments in central areas of Liverpool but unlike most of these, it is not managed by companies that are already established providers of student accommodation in the city and run several buildings there.<sup>1</sup> It is managed by a firm called Host which is the customer facing brand of a residential management company called Victoria Hall Management running several student accommodation developments all over the country (Host, 2017). However, this is only the tip of the complex company network that is involved

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<sup>1</sup> Such as for instance, Unite, L1 Lettings, Sanctuary or Downing.

in the specific student accommodation development on the corner of Hope Street and Myrtle Street with the patchy brick façade.

The starting point is a company called Maghull Developments who has previously bought the site in question from Liverpool John Moores University and seems to have sold it to a company called Student Castle (Liverpool City Council, 2017g). This is where parts of the mystery start because although Student Castle is an established provider of student accommodation, they do not seem to own or manage any properties in Liverpool and I noticed that after a few initial letters their name does not appear in any of the planning application documents anymore. Instead a Surrey-based company called Nordic Constructions is addressed in most letters. They seem to be the owner of the site and main contractor for the construction of the building (Liverpool City Council, 2017h). This company specialised in the delivery of building elements that are constructed off-site in Latvia and are then shipped to the specific location where they are needed (Guy, 2014; Place North West, 2015). In an interview, a company representative from Nordic Construction refers to this process as revolutionary technology that has been “a revelation to the client, the construction team and the local community who have never seen a project so fast or so smart” (Guy, 2014). Only weeks after the building was finished Nordic Constructions went into administration owing millions of debt to sub-contractors and banks and are thus also impossible to hold accountable for the patchy brick façade (Place North West, 2015; Parry, 2016; Companies House, 2017).

Yet, the full story of Nordic Construction does not end there because actually the company is a subsidiary for NCH Capital, a private equity firm with its headquarters on Fifth Avenue in New York and with the Hope Street student accommodation as its first project in the UK (Place North West, 2015). NCH Capital was created in 1993 and its two founders refer to themselves as “pioneer[s] in the Russian equity market” because they spotted the “privatization opportunities” that were brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union (NCH Capital Inc., 2017b). In 1991, as an attempt to target “inefficiencies in capital-starved markets”, NCH’s founders started investing and buying up property in Russia and the Baltic countries, only months (potentially weeks) after the complete opening of the iron curtain (NCH Capital Inc., 2017a). The

economic activities of NCH Capital go way beyond the investment in construction and real estate to also include private equity and 'agribusiness', with half of their economic activity originating in their role as the self-proclaimed largest farm operators in Russia and Ukraine (NCH Capital Inc., 2017a). However, since the bankruptcy of Nordic Constructions, NCH Capital has sold the student accommodation development to BlackRock, an American investment management corporation also situated on New York's Fifth Avenue, and rumour has it that the partly fallen bricks may see some necessary repairs after the exam period of spring 2017 (Houghton, 2017).

In summary, the missing bricks in the façade of the student accommodation block in Liverpool's Hope Street can be linked to complex global political and economic processes. It does not just show the international influence on student accommodation developments in the UK but it is also an example of how international flows of capital impact on localities. This development could be made sense of within the broad concept of globalisation which, from a perspective of historical-geographical materialism, refers to spatially grounded processes of capital accumulation and reproduction (Harvey, 2001). It denotes ideas about the mobility of capital and its uneven distribution in the world for instance, implied in the notion of the "spatial fix", which describes the mounting of capital on the ground (Harvey, 2001). Student accommodation developments constitute a spatial fix in a two-fold process in the sense that capital is grounded in place (for instance, in Liverpool) but is also grounded materially in the shape of a building. As such the notion of the spatial fix describes how global processes and international capital become embedded in particular places and in doing so the concept "re-emphasizes the value of the geographical standpoint in understanding contemporary processes of globalization" (Harvey, 2001: 30).<sup>2</sup> As the next chapter will elaborate, all of this happens in the

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<sup>2</sup> Much more could be said about different intellectual approaches to the study of globalisation and also Harvey's understanding of the concept could only be touched upon very briefly here. However, historical materialism was only used as one example to show how the complex networks of companies and capital in the student accommodation development on Liverpool's Hope Street might be interpreted from a global perspective.

backdrop of urban governments who are facilitating the grounding of international capital in their constituencies through entrepreneurial policies aimed at attracting investment and enabling economic growth (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998).

## 1.2. A Sense of Place for Student Accommodation

Back in Liverpool's Hope Street, I might be one of the only people who thinks about the collapse of the Soviet Union when walking past the student accommodation development with its patchy brick façade. A statue halfway along Hope Street shows two deceased bishops of the two cathedrals that border the road at each end, and in a metal circle on the floor it is written "We meet in Hope". The ambivalence of this statement can be interpreted in numerous ways with the research into the background of this student accommodation building revealing all sorts of connections to world history. This type of analysis could be conducted with any building on Hope Street – who knows where in history I would end up if I traced the development of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Philharmonic Dining Rooms which are situated just across from the student accommodation development? However, most importantly for this research



Figure 1.2. The 'Better Together' statue by broadbent.studio on Hope Street stating 'We meet in hope'.



despite the clear influence of various global processes on the construction of this building, for people who walk past it, it is made sense of within a specific local context and the meanings that are generated around it are diverse and standpoint specific. The student accommodation on Hope Street shows that cities are shaped by political and economic contexts outside of its scope but it also shows how these developments are made sense of locally and can spark myriad of debate and discussion.

Doreen Massey was a scholar who developed profound theories about the nature and meaning of place and large parts of this thesis draw on her distinct understanding of a sense of place, a concept that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. One of Massey's central claims referred to the idea that "[t]he identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple", a thought that emphasises the importance of studying the individual when exploring the meaning of place (2007: 5). For her, place is not just a product of history but is actively shaped and altered by the social relations it contains. She argued that "there is no getting away from the fact that the social is inexorably spatial" (1992: 80) and she interpreted place as a meeting point of various people, from diverse background, adhering to different interpretation schemes (2007: 154). For her, global developments, for instance, improvements in communication technology that seem to overcome physical distances and borders, did not reduce the significance and distinctiveness of place but quite the opposite, they brought about locally unique social relations and meanings. According to Massey, places are combinations of unique local features and wider societal relations, creating a distinct context for the interpretation and sense-making of processes and developments that play out there (Massey, 2007).

Places are "complex locations where numerous different, and frequently conflicting, communities intersect" and controversy around student accommodation in Liverpool, as described with the construction of the development on Hope Street, is one example of these types of struggles and multiple ways of sense-making (Massey, 2007: 156). There is a variety of actors who attempt to stabilise ideas of what places are for and about to create certain physical, social and economic urban landscapes (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Attempts to fix the meanings of place are a common

strategy in urban politics in order to create economically more prosperous images of a certain locality and to attract capital-rich classes and individuals to invest in places (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998). As I will argue in this thesis, these types of practices are bound up with all sorts of problematic assumptions and processes and they tend to create landscapes of exclusion and segregation rather than constituting the cosmopolitan and multicultural places they claim to be. Debates concerning student infrastructure in cities, whether they are ostensibly addressing student accommodation, university campuses, or entertainment facilities, are at the core of discussions around the fixing of place meanings in order to add economic value to place. This is because students have been conceptualised as powerful and visible groups in cities with the potential to strongly influence the environments they move and live in (Van den Berg and Russo, 2004; Russo and Tatjer, 2007; Holton and Riley, 2013; Smith et al., 2014; Kinton et al., 2016). The study of how different groups make sense of environments and create place meanings is thus tangled up with questions of power and can tell something about broader socio-economic processes in cities but also how they are experienced and interpreted from a specific standpoint.

The patchy brick façade of the student accommodation development on Hope Street constitutes a visible and material analogy to some of the conflicts that play out around the lives of large student populations in cities and their relationship to place. There are many assumptions about the requirements, needs and sense-making of students and much economic activity in cities like Liverpool is built on these expectations. At the same time little is known about why students engage in certain social, economic and spatial practices and how this relates to their understanding of what it means to be a student. In order to explore urban life and understand how some global processes play out there, an approach that studies how individuals and urban groups generate meaning from practices and spaces in the city can be helpful in illuminating broader dynamics behind urban politics and the influence of international flows of capital on space. This will be the main task of the research presented here which investigates students' relationship to the university city and how they develop a sense of place in this environment on the example of Liverpool. I am interested in exploring what it means to be a student in the city and how these

ideas are lived out in urban space. Grounded in a phenomenological approach which emphasises the study of different layers of meaning, I tried to get a closer sense of students' engagement with place through the use of autophotography, photo-elicitation and walking interviews and the results of these conversations and walks are summarised through the application of a frame analysis approach inspired by Erving Goffman.

The notion of the 'student experience' is commonly used by all sorts of people – whether it is university managers, academic scholars and teachers, accommodation developers or students themselves – to describe disparate aspects to the lives of university students. As a concept it is a mess, in the sense that its content and meaning are not clearly defined and depending on the standpoint of an actor different aspects are included into the term or left out. However, despite the amorphous nature of the 'student experience' it is a notion that serves as a measurement indicator on which the 'performances' of academic researchers and teachers as well as whole universities are evaluated on (Bhardwa, 2017). Further, full administrative roles are created in UK universities for people whose task it is to safeguard and manage a positive and comprehensive 'student experience'. Yet, beyond the campus students are making sense of their 'experience' of what it means to be a student through many practices that are not even related to their educational achievements. Thus, while the 'student experience' is bound up with a particular business model to the delivery of higher education and its evaluation, it also seems to encompass a variety of actors, organisations, and spaces in the city outside of the university campus. Ultimately, in this research I am interested in gaining a somewhat clearer understanding what the 'student experience' is and what it stands in for. In particular, in this thesis I explore what it means to have a 'student experience' from the perspective of university students and how this is made sense of within urban space.

### 1.3. Thesis Structure

In addition to this Introduction and the Conclusion, this thesis is divided into three main parts. The first discusses what has been done to date in the field, the second gives an overview of my own data collection and analysis strategies, and the final part discusses my findings. To be more specific, Part One (containing Chapters Two and Three) addresses the research literature relevant to the broader study of how students develop a sense of place. Here, I explore different ways of conceptualising the place-space relationship and discuss what a sense of place means with regard to the theories of Doreen Massey. This understanding of place is incorporated into the notion of the entrepreneurial city, a concept that very broadly describes how the altering of place meanings can be used to facilitate economic growth and attract investment to a locality. Through discussing the concept of symbolic economies, I explore the contention that the promotion and visibility of certain cultures is a central aspect to entrepreneurial strategies which facilitate the use of practices and space as markers of distinction. In establishing urban entrepreneurialism as a context to the practices of students in cities, this analysis is followed by a discussion of the predominantly UK centric research that studies aspects of the lives of students in urban environments. The first part focuses on discussions about residential patterns, specifically the concept of 'studentification', in order to get a better idea of how students make residential decisions and why they choose certain residential areas. In the second part, I discuss the notion of the neoliberal university and the privatisation of Higher Education (HE) in relation to the supposed commodification of student culture in and outside of university campuses. After that, I pick up on discussions of what it means to be a student with a specific emphasis on the types of practices and characteristics that mark out some students as being different from the rest of the group and contribute to their partial exclusion from the student community. The final part of this chapter looks at the comparatively small amount of literature that studies students' urban practices also outside of residential environments for instance, through the exploration of nightlife entertainment providers that specifically target students.

The second part of this thesis is constituted by Chapters Four and Five and focuses on the exploration of a suitable research methodology and associated methods. Effectively, this part is a discussion of how my methods worked out in the fieldwork process and how they underpinned the subsequent analytic approach. Chapter Four starts off by identifying the specific research gaps that developed out of the analysis of previous studies about students in cities and states four specific research questions. In the quest to find a methodology that is sensitive to individual sense-making while at the same time offering an opportunity to collectivise these individual meanings, I introduce social constructionism and empirical phenomenology as the underlying approaches informing this research. Both philosophies emphasise the importance of studying people's account of reality based on the assumption that all that can be known about the social world is how it appears to people. In building on these theories of knowledge, I discuss the methods of autophotography, photo-elicitation and walking interviews as suitable tools to get a closer and deeper understanding of the lived experiences of students and the role of place within. Following on from this, in Chapter Five I provide a detailed account how these methods worked out in practices and I establish Liverpool as my case study site together with several sampling justifications.<sup>3</sup> The second half of this chapter, introduces a frame analysis approach inspired by sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) as a phenomenological tool to explore and dissect the data according to different layers of meaning attached to practices in urban space.

The third and final part of this thesis covers Chapters Six, Seven and Eight and constitutes the main sections in which I discuss and analyse the findings. In accordance with the frame analysis approach, the practices of the students provide the starting point for the analysis. Each analysis chapter explores a set of activities (bundled under an umbrella term) and unpacks the meaning structure that is associated to it from the perspective of the participants. The first analysis chapter (Chapter Six) discusses the overall practice of consuming in exploring the ways in which students make sense of the reported activities of shopping, visiting cafes and

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<sup>3</sup> My research focuses on undergraduate students from the University of Liverpool.

restaurants and engaging in nightlife. In that discussion, I put a specific emphasis on the places in which this happens and how this is rendered meaningful for the participants' idea of what it means to be a student. The second analysis chapter (Chapter Seven) explores the activity of living, an umbrella term that contains all sorts of practices of students within their houses and residential environments. In this discussion, particular attention is paid to the ideal-typical housing pathway that students choose and how different residential spaces are associated with certain types of practices, deemed appropriate only for very specific years in students' university education. In the final analysis chapter (Chapter Eight) I discuss the umbrella terms of studying and exploring in relation to all of the practices that students engage in to participate in university and their degree programmes but also to explore how students get to know their place of study outside of university and student-centric areas in the city. Ultimately, this discussion is based on an exploration of the notion of the 'student experience'<sup>4</sup>, a social construction that implies the importance of space in defining what it means to be a student and how membership to the student community can be achieved and maintained.

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<sup>4</sup> The scare quotes around the term 'student experience' indicate that this is not a taken for granted or accepted notion and does not have a clear meaning to it. While I will not continue to use scare quotes for this term, whenever 'student experience' appears in this text it should be imagined to be embedded in scare quotes.

## CHAPTER 2

### Place, Culture, and the Entrepreneurial City

The observation that the majority of the world's population now lives in cities (The World Bank, 2016) is often cited to establish the significance studying urban life, to the degree that it seems to have become a normal rationalisation for research about the urban. The percentage includes people living in suburban Liverpool, in 'slums' in Mumbai, in high rise tower buildings in Shanghai or in various other 'residential' conditions. It contains office workers, artists, students, waste pickers, politicians and sex workers. It sweeps across people of differing ages, genders, educational backgrounds, upbringings, ideologies, et cetera. In short, the percentage covers (up) a vast amount of 'urban experiences'. Furthermore, the logic of justifying the importance of urban research in the argument that more than fifty percent of the world population live in cities, would in theory also jeopardise the legitimacy of any type of urban research before 2007/2008, when the population demographics tipped over. Considering this, the percentage is not a helpful category that could meaningfully explain why cities and life within them is worth being studied. It does not seem to be a useful frame to explore any type of human settlement since it does not recognise that cities are interesting places and important research sites, even if their number of inhabitants is not of statistical significance in terms of the world population. Ultimately, place (in any shape or size) matters because being emplaced is essential to human reality since a "persona non locata" (Gieryn, 2000: 482) effectively does not exist. Being a member of a human society inevitably means to be placed.

Analysis of place and place-meanings is central to this research which explores how undergraduate students make sense of and structure their practices within the city they live and study in. Relatedly, culture, understood here very broadly as a way of life (Williams, 1985; Moran, 2014b), is essential in this process of assigning meaning to an environment because students, as many other groups, seem to explain their practices and the spaces in which this happens as markers of distinction relative to

local non-student populations. Furthermore, seen as a driving force in the quest for growth and investment, notions of 'student culture' are being commodified and made visible through the dedication of various urban services and infrastructure to their supposed needs; for instance, with developers of student accommodation and other companies and entrepreneurs renting and buying up land to achieve economic surplus through a contribution to the 'student economy' (Smith and Holt, 2007; Chatterton, 2010; Collins, 2010). The development of student accommodation, whether it regards the conversion of single-family terraced housing into Houses in Multiple Occupation (from now on HMO) or the building of blocks of PBSA, is just one example of how different economic modes imply a reorganisation of space (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2001). It also emphasises the eagerness of city councils to attract inward investment, which in turn enables small and large investors to influence neighbourhoods and local housing markets (Smith, 2005, 2008; Hubbard, 2009). Because of that, notions of student culture and analyses of students' place-making practices have to be situated within an economic context in which commodification profoundly impacts the practices themselves, the group of people exercising them and the urban environment in which they take place.

In taking the study of place as a starting point, in this chapter I will situate my research in broader discussions around the notion of 'a sense of place' (Massey, 2007) including considerations of localised forms of space. I will explore how and why practices of place marketing are efforts by local governments to inscribe place with rather fixed meanings in an attempt to regulate the types of publics and practices that are present there. Place promotion will be situated within the concept of the entrepreneurial city and the broader notion that cities now are governed in ways that favour growth and the attraction of economic investment rather than looking at questions of basic welfare provision and growth distribution. The stimulation and visualisation of a specific social reality in these environments will be discussed also with regard to the notion of symbolic economies and the significance culture plays in the production of spectacular sites. Understanding culture as a way of life of distinct social groups, Bourdieu's notions of symbolic capital and distinction (2004) will be unpacked in reference to the idea that people make sense of their choices in the city



in opposition to other groups. Finally, various types of student services and infrastructure will be situated as being part of entrepreneurial strategies in arguing that student culture forms an important and visible part of local economies.

## 2.1. Locating Space and Place

Following up on the focus of place established as a key starting point for this research, there are two main questions that arise: What is place and why does it matter? Discussions of place need to be situated within the notion of space since the least that can be said about these two concepts is that they stand in some kind of relationship to each other. However, how exactly they interact or perhaps even replace each other is still debated to the degree that Hubbard (2012) argues that space is still insufficiently defined especially with regard to its ontology. A common starting point for the space-place discussion is the idea to treat them as binaries with place referring to the local, the particular, the meaningful and space referring to the global, the universal and the abstract (Massey, 2006). A further idea to describe the space-place relationship is the notion of compartmentalisation with place as the immediate bodily environment situated in space which constitutes an “encompassing volumetric void” (Casey, 1996, 2001: 683). In this view, place is a subdivision of space, it is space with a location and a meaning. The idea that place is nested in space but as such also transcends national borders and states can also be found in Gupta and Ferguson (1992) who argue that “space itself becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural differences, historical memory, and societal organization are inscribed” (1992: 7).

Doreen Massey (2006) is one of the most profound critics of this interpretation of the space-place relationship arguing that place and space are inherently intertwined. While it does not seem that she disagrees with the conceptualisation of place as a specific, immediate, every-day and meaningful setting, it appears to be the role of space and its interpretation as a meaningless void outside of everyday experiences that she contests. She argues that “[o]ne cannot seriously posit space as the outside of place as lived, or simply equate ‘the everyday’ with the local” (2006: 185). In the

early 1990s, Massey wrote that “‘Space’ is very much on the agenda these days” (1992: 65) and that the spatial is affected by the social and vice versa in arguing that space is socially constructed but also that the social is spatially constructed (also in Harvey, 1990). Leading on from this her strongest point of criticism goes towards conceptions of place as increasingly becoming less distinctive due to developments such as globalisation (in its broadest sense). Casey (2001) uses the notion of ‘glocalisation’ to describe a process in which places are increasingly opened up to the world and as such, turned into space as they become locally less distinctive and unique. The ‘Los Angeles School’ (so-called) is another prominent example for the dissemination of the theory that increasingly cities are characterised by sameness and lose their distinctive qualities (Dear and Flusty, 1997; Dear, 2002). In arguing that the postmodern city resembles a theme park in which the urban environment is a simulation of an actual city in which experiences are bought and commodified, they posit that in effect cities lose their local distinctiveness and become “ageographically integrated monocultures” (Dear and Flusty, 1997: 160).<sup>5</sup>

While the idea that advancements in communication technology and economic restructuring over the past decades has created a different and more global sense of community and identity is present in many discussions of space, there is disagreement about how this has influenced the character or even existence of place (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Massey, 2006; Seamon and Sowers, 2008). People’s interactions and practices are not just grounded in place but can and must be situated in a global context to explore how “processes of place-making meet the changing global economic and political conditions of lived spaces” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 11). Ultimately, it is Massey’s who in her rejection of abstracted accounts of space

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<sup>5</sup> A major issue with the LA School is that they have no theory of place or the lived experiences of the postmodern city they are describing and mapping. In contrast to the Chicago School which besides the positivist models of urban growth also fostered an ethnographic tradition, the LA School does not have or stand for any type of method and connected to this has no portfolio of studies conducted in their tradition (Becker, 1999; Jackson, 1999; Dear et al, 2008). As such there is no account of how the presumed aspatiality and sameness of place is actually experienced and made sense of in everyday life.

states that her “argument is not that place is not concrete, grounded, real, lived etc. etc. It is that space is too” (2006: 185).

While this discussion brings us closer to the rejection of space as a binary opposite to place in establishing it as a meaningful and grounded ‘sphere’, the main ontological questions with regard to the nature of space persist and will not be discussed further. What is especially important for this research is that despite global influences on local contexts, place remains a meaningful site and the influence of space on place is characterised by the creation of local variations and distinctiveness of global developments. As will become apparent in this chapter, discussions of student culture are illuminated by theories of space and place, considering that national and international companies offer their services to students, who in turn make sense of these offers within a local context.

### Senses of Place

The discussion of how global processes influence social experiences of a certain locality opens up the way in which the concept of place is used in this research. Above, it has already been assumed that place is more than just a spot on the map, a physical location or a setting where practices take place (Rodman, 1992). However, the main questions regarding the nature of place remain: What is place and why does it matter? Massey’s concept of space as meaningfully influencing experiences of place and the interrelation she establishes between the two is at the core of her understanding of a sense of place (Massey, 2007; Kitchin, 2016). Effectively, this sense of place emphasises the uniqueness of place while also describing the influence of wider structural factors on it. Place is local and global at the same time, has multiple identities and is invested with different sets of meaning.

Meaning is central to Thomas Gieryn’s (2000) definition of place which assigns three characteristics: a unique geographical location; a material form with regard to being built and designed but also contested; and an investment with meaning and value. Recognising that place is perhaps even the “most fundamental form of embodied experience” (Feld and Basso, 1996), scholars have turned to phenomenology to

understand how the individual creates meaning in and of place. More will be said about (empirical) phenomenology as the underlying research methodology to this study in a later chapter, suffice to say here that phenomenology studies how the social world appears to individuals based on the idea that only people's constructions of reality can be studied. Taking this as a starting point, phenomenology argues that questions of place must be investigated from the point of view of perception, seeing the individual as a unit of analysis based on the idea that "place independence is in many ways impossible" (Seamon and Sowers, 2008: 50). Gieryn in his pursuit of a "place-sensitive sociology" (2000: 464) follows up on this point arguing that any sociological study is emplaced. Places are not just a setting for a certain action but they shape practices as much as the practices shape them. Because of that he proposes that sociological studies are informed by a sense of place which he defines as the "attribution of meaning to a built-form or natural spot" (Gieryn, 2000: 472).

A sense of place entails the social practice of attributing meaning to the environment and although places and what people call place come in various shapes and sizes the common factor is that they are all "centers of meaning to individuals and groups" (Tuan, 1975: 153). Places are made by their occupants but the meanings that these occupants attach to place are unfixed, disputed, and diverse and places are thus sites of contested meanings (Rodman, 1992; Feld and Basso, 1996; Massey, 2007). Places are created through shared cultural and historical understandings of such, since occupants in a certain place engage in practices which emphasise and reproduce their own sense of place (Basso, 1996; Kahn, 1996, Gieryn, 2000). Viewing place as a cultural production links discussions of place to broader questions of power based on the argument that certain groups are more powerful in assigning a seemingly fixed meaning to place, giving those who do not adhere to these meanings a sense of exclusion. This assumption will also be discussed later in reference to Bourdieu's (2004) concepts of field and capital. In tune with a phenomenological approach to the study of place meanings, individual accounts of sense-making in the urban environment constitute a methodological starting point for the fieldwork of this research. The accounts of undergraduate student that are being analysed in this research have to be situated within a specific political and economic context of cities,

the next section will discuss this idea in connection to a practice often referred to as urban entrepreneurialism and especially the notion of place marketing within.

## 2.2. Inscribing Place with Meaning

In reference to the breaking down of the Berlin Wall, David Harvey (1990) has argued that bottom-up attempts to change the meaning of a place are often interpreted as threats to a specific social order. While it has been argued that place meanings are to some degree always unfixed, varied and contested (Massey, 2007), efforts to stabilise the meaning of place by governments and city councils are common practice in urban politics and usually referred to as place promotion, place marketing or city branding. The commissioning of images of place by city governments in order to dissociate from seemingly negative place associations is one of the most important components of place promotion (Harvey, 1989; Jones, 2013), to the degree that Hall and Hubbard (1998: 200) discuss the notion of the “virtual city”, in reference to how these representations make it impossible to distinguish between myth and urban reality. While image marketing is a very common component of place promotion, in itself it does not guarantee economic success considering that it is the physical space and the built environment that to some degree need to represent the new image of the city (Short and Kim, 1998). As studies of the sociology of architecture show, the changes that are made to the built environment and images thereof are utilised to create new representations of a social reality that is desired to be carried out there (Jones, 2011). This aspect of place promotion has received much criticism based on the argument that the “propagation of image by cities necessitates a process of social exclusion in the imagination of new urban identities” and that the people who the image is supposed to appeal to are predominantly white and wealthy (Hall and Hubbard, 1998: 28).

The practice of place promotion has to be situated in the broader process of the commodification of place in which the meanings that are often artificially enhanced or assigned to certain areas add economic value to a site (Lefebvre, 1991). Various other urban processes and practices such as gentrification or urban regeneration

could be mentioned as examples of how changes in place meanings can add economic value to a specific environment. Although the notion of studentification, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, does not neatly fit into this row of examples, the concept certainly also implies the commodification of urban space through the designation of areas as suitable for students' leisure and housing purposes. Logan and Molotch (2013) speak about place entrepreneurs who through some kind of economic activity enhance the usage and value of land and they situate this practice within the urban "growth machine", a concept describing the quest for increased development at the expense of other focuses, such as social concerns or issues of sustainability. This quest for growth and economic investment is often referred to as urban entrepreneurialism with the entrepreneurial city as its subject and laboratory.

Despite the observation that urban entrepreneurialism has been conceptualised as a messy concept due to the diverse ways in which it is understood; still there are some underpinning assumptions that accompany its use (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Most commonly the concept is used to mark a shift in how cities are governed relative to the "proactive promotion of local economic development by local government in alliance with other private sector agencies" (Hall and Hubbard, 1998: 30). A corollary of this focus is a reduction of inward-looking policies aiming to provide welfare for the local population (Harvey, 1989). The degree to which city governments encourage and engage in the former or the latter strongly varies and city councils are rarely entrepreneurial actors themselves since they tend to only create opportunities for economic investment (Jessop, 1998). As such they become advocates of a particular growth strategy rather than looking at questions of even resource distribution (Molotch, 1976). The argument that economic investment in urban areas unequally benefits people but even more importantly actively disadvantages some social groups is probably one of the most common arguments against the marketing, privatisation and sell-off of urban land as part of entrepreneurial policies (Harvey, 1989).

With this in mind, place marketing has to be seen in the context of a broader trade-off in which money is spent on the promotion of tourism and economic investment

rather than supporting welfare services (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Situated in a narrative of global inter-urban competition which implies that cities compete against each other over visitors, investment and resources, the entrepreneurial city has been conceptualised within neoliberalism which I only broadly define here as a practice that tries to enforce the rule of the market over increasingly more aspects of social life (Harvey, 1989; Brenner and Theodore, 2002). It is worth quoting Brenner and Theodore at length to emphasise the scale of neoliberal entrepreneurial policies on the urban:

[C]ities [...] have become increasingly important geographical targets and institutional laboratories for a variety of neoliberal policy experiments, from place-marketing, enterprise and empowerment zones, local tax abatements, urban development corporations, public-private partnerships, and new forms of local boosterism to workfare policies, property-redevelopment schemes, business-incubator projects, new strategies of social control, policing, and surveillance, and a host of other institutional modifications with the local and regional state apparatus. (2002: 368)

Urban entrepreneurialism thus involves a shift in how cities are governed (and policed) and points at a process in which private sector actors become more powerful in influencing the meaning and usage of place. They are encouraged and courted by city governments to buy up land and buildings forming public-private partnerships, a centrepiece of urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989). The supposed benefits of this strategy are purely speculative rather than immediate and they are more likely to increase socio-economic inequalities and polarisation in cities. In the quest to attract capital usually but not exclusively from non-local companies and investors, the entrepreneurial city and analyses thereof are then situated within the space-place relationship discussed earlier. National and international actors and companies impact the local through the attempt to generate profit by establishing their presence and selling their services in certain localities but in turn, according to Massey (2007), these global actors and their offer is shaped by the specific locality they are being dropped in, creating a local variation of a national or international conception.

In their comprehensive analysis of UK nightlife, Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands (2002, 2004) provide a compelling example of one aspect of urban life that is heavily shaped by entrepreneurial strategies and that shows “the consequences of letting

corporate power, profit and the pro-growth entrepreneurial state go unchecked” (Chatterton and Hollands, 2004: xii). A crucial argument of their work is that night-time economies have become a major part of urban growth strategies, on the surface creating colourful clusters of consumption but with the underlying dynamic of facilitating the exclusion of various groups of people. Through the notion of “studentland” they situate students as a central group in this process (Chatterton and Hollands, 2004: 126). Students are targeted by leisure providers and their consumption practices in these places leave a distinctive mark on the locality, identifying it as suitable for students and mainly students only. Also in this research, consumption in general and nightlife in particular were established as significant practices in determining what it means to be a student and in making sense of the urban environment. This will be discussed in detail in one of the following chapters which explores the ways in which students consume and how this is relevant for their understanding of student culture.

### Promoting Exclusion through Symbolic Economies

Situating the promotion of certain services and commercial infrastructure such as nightlife within urban entrepreneurial policies, sees culture (and its various notions) commodified and mobilised as part of place marketing strategies. The use of cultures for these purposes has been criticised widely for the stereotypical, staged and superficial representations of such and the assumption that they are being reductively instrumentalised to stimulate consumption and economic transactions (e.g. Harvey, 1992; Zukin, 1995; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Logan and Molotch, 2013). In his criticism of postmodern urbanism, Harvey (1992) introduced the concept of spectacle, describing a particular way of how urban places are branded as spectacular sites for consumption. He states that “[a]bove all, the city has to appear as an innovative, exciting, creative, and safe place to live or visit, to play and consume in” (Harvey, 1989: 9). The aim is to create a particular image of the city that in reality only emphasises certain places and cultures but comes to stand for the city as a whole and as such is covering up all sorts of inequalities that might be present there (Harvey, 1992). The notion of spectacle therefore reminds us that “urban space, amenity and



urban cultures have become valuable commodities for sale in the global marketplace” (Stevenson, 2003: 97) and that they are utilised to attract tourists, spending consumers and economic investment in general. With regard to the notion of spectacle, Hall and Hubbard point out that “the cultural transformation of previously productive cities into ‘spectacular’ cities of (and for) consumption, populated by a harmonious cosmopolitan citizenry, has been hypothesised as perhaps the most important element of entrepreneurial forms of local politics” (1998: 8).

In discussing the concept of spectacle as sites that are created in order to be economically, symbolically, and visually consumed, also the perspective of the “looking subject” has to be considered, based on the idea that the production of places and images is closely related to their consumption (Crang, 1997: 360). In *The Tourist Gaze* John Urry (2005) focuses on tourists who are supposed to be attracted by those images and representations of urban life. He describes a complicated relationship between visitors vis-à-vis local residents and discusses various ‘gazes’ and how they are available to the former group but not the latter (e.g. the romantic gaze, the collective gaze, the spectatorial gaze, and several more). Urry explains how tourists see the places they are visiting in the backdrop of certain expectations and desires and in the quest to discover things that are extraordinary, gazes help tourists to make sense of their experiences. In order to fulfil these anticipations, a whole industry comprising a multitude of actors (city councils but also private companies and entrepreneurs) creates ‘objects’ for tourists to gaze upon.

Gazes organise the encounters of visitors with the ‘other’, providing some sense of competence, pleasure and structure to those experiences. The gaze demarcates an array of pleasurable qualities to be generated within particular times and spaces. It is the gaze that orders and regulates the relationships between the various sensuous experiences while away, identifying what is visually out-of-ordinary, what are the relevant differences and what is ‘other’.  
(Urry, 2005: 145)

Even though Urry refers to what is being gazed upon as an object, it is not just the physical environment or tangible items and bodies that are being looked at and evaluated, but culture and symbolic representations thereof are equally important to the tourist gaze. In using the term ‘object’ Urry shows that tourism involves the

consumption of commodified tangible and intangible aspects and elements to a destination.

As the analysis in a later chapter will show, the notion of the tourist gaze is relevant for this research in two ways, with some of the students comparing their position in the city to the one of a tourist and with other participants emphasising the visual element of their relationship to the city in referring to themselves as 'onlookers'. In this characterisation, the students' account of their position in the city is also very close to Simmel's notion of 'The Stranger' as someone who is not "a wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow" (2004 [1950]: 73). Simmel describes an ambivalent character who is ready to leave but might not move on, who is part of a group but in other ways does not really belong and someone who is close but also far removed from the life around her or him. As will be seen later, the idea that students are there and not there, based on self-characterisations as semi-permanent residents with a very partial understanding of the university city will be discussed with regard to the notion of the 'student gaze', a concept inspired by John Urry's work.

While Urry (2005) does not seem to connect his account of the tourist gaze to broader ideas around the concept of the entrepreneurial city or the commodification of place, other scholars have argued that practices of place promotion and spectacle are not just about the promotion of physical spaces but also contain symbolic power (Stevenson, 2003: 98). This feeds into Sharon Zukin's notion of symbolic economies and the important role of culture in producing images that indicate "'who belongs' in specific places" (1995: 1). Zukin situates culture within entrepreneurial strategies and she conceptualises it as a source of conflict because only certain cultures are promoted and made visible in the attempt to appeal to visitors. Her concept of symbolic economies describes how these dominant cultures influence the social production of space and how they have more power than other cultures to attribute meaning to the physical environment (Zukin, 1995: 23-24). As such, the focus of symbolic economies is on dominant representations of the city and resulting patterns of in/exclusion since only the practices of some groups are represented in specific environments. As a consequence, what happens to culture in symbolic economies is

that it is being reduced to a marketable good, an “[i]nstrument, commodity, theme park, and fetish: culture is something that *sells*, something that is *seen*” (Zukin, 1995: 263, italics in original).

The interpretation of place-making practices as political acts of in/exclusion of certain social groups keys into broader discussions of cities as spaces of difference and segregation, an aspect of urban life that was already mapped in the concentric circles model of the Chicago School (Burgess, [1925] 2013). “Geographies of exclusion” can thus be interpreted as an outcome of entrepreneurial policies allowing some social groups to dominate and monopolise space (Sibley, 2015). In this characterisation, the city is conceptualised as an arena containing the actions of numerous groups and the cooperative but also conflicting nature of these practices (Mumford, [1937] 2004). Also Louis Wirth pointed to this element of struggle arguing that “[t]he competition for space is great, so that each area generally tends to be put to the use which yields the greatest economic return” (1938: 14-15). As the city is a place that is occupied by different groups of people, these social groups have different types of access to urban areas and experience these spaces in multiple and competing ways (Stevenson, 2003). The built environment then constitutes a setting in which negotiations of space and its meaning take place and where the notion of culture is employed to cover up uneven urban development (Hall, 2004). Spaces thus physically but also symbolically indicate which groups of people are welcome and which are not.<sup>6</sup> With regard to university students, as it will become apparent further on, the connotation of certain urban spaces as ‘student areas’ has a strong potential to work in an exclusionary way on anyone who is not a student.

### 2.3. Culture and Distinction

In interpreting the city as a place where various processes of in/exclusion take place, it was argued above that ‘culture’ has an essential role in describing how different social groups attach multiple meanings to spaces but also how some of these

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, through measures such as target hardening (Weidner, 1996; Lum et al., 2006), gating (Low, 2004) and practices of ‘designing out’ certain populations.

meanings are physically and/or symbolically more powerful than others. However, culture as a concept has several contested meanings and its application in this research needs further unpacking. Raymond Williams (1985: 87-93) gives an interesting account of how the meanings of the term culture have developed over centuries and how historically the term was often used interchangeably with what is referred to nowadays as civilisation or cultivation. He establishes three main meanings of the notion of culture: firstly, referring to culture as a process of intellectual development, in other words the cultivation of the mind; secondly, the notion of culture as referring to 'the arts', meaning artistic but also intellectual products; and finally, culture as a way of life of individuals and groups and the social practices that this entails (1985: 90). For this research as well as discussions of symbolic economies, the latter meaning of 'culture' is of relevance with its focus on "a set of collective practices and values through which one society is differentiated from another" (Miles et al., 2004: 53). As Williams (1981) has pointed out, the consequence of this is that cultural life is studied in association with social life and that the concept of culture as a way of life involves a system of signs through which individuals and groups distinguish themselves from each other. This is also in line with Zukin's interpretation of culture as a "system for producing symbols" (1995: 12) in which an economic transaction is aided by the communication of cultural meanings through certain signs.

Places and their meanings are essential components of how cultures are lived but also vice versa, cultures are instrumentalised to influence the meanings of place based on the idea that it is a means of distinction through which individuals associate with each other but also distinguish themselves from other groups in the city. While his ideas can only be discussed briefly and superficially here, Pierre Bourdieu and his concepts of habitus, field, class and capital (as discussed below) are immensely influential in shaping the understanding of the notion of distinction used in this research. The interpretation of distinction as a practice in urban environments by which groups dissociate from each other through their spatial choices was already pointed out by Harvey who argued that "[b]y exploring the realms of differentiated tastes and aesthetic preferences [...], architects and urban designers have re-

emphasized a powerful aspect of capital accumulation: the production and consumption of what Bourdieu [...] calls 'symbolic capital'" (1992: 77). The concept of symbolic capital, which will be briefly explained below, has thus been established as an important theoretical construct to understand cities and the lives of groups and individuals within (Miles et al., 2004).

What Bourdieu calls symbolic capital relates to his concept of habitus, a property of actors that is sensitive to experiences in the past and conditions in the present which shapes their sense-making of events and observations in the present and in the future (Maton, 2014). Habitus is thus about how a person's past structures experiences in the present but habitus is constantly evolving as each day/minute/second people act and make decisions influencing their future behaviour and sense-making. However, the ability to acquire symbolic capital is not just dependent on habitus but also on 'field', the social world where interactions and practices take place which shapes and in turn is shaped by habitus. As such, a field is a social space that contains specific sets of rules and beliefs and according to Bourdieu promotes competition in the sense that actors try to improve their position in the field through the accumulation of necessary capital (Thomson, 2014). In turn, the possession of adequate capital means that actors will feel more natural in a field and experience a "field-habitus match" (Maton, 2014: 58). Bourdieu's concept of habitus is thus essential to the formation of symbolic capital since it predisposes and enables people to make certain decisions and engage in certain actions that can lead to the acquisition of symbolic capital. The notion of field plays an important role since it is not just people's habitus but also the rules of the field or in other words the social space the individuals are in that makes access to symbolic capital easier or more difficult to obtain.

Bourdieu introduced the concept of economic and cultural capital as opposing forces in an abstract field symbolising social space and positions people according to their possession (or lack of) either type of capital, claiming that people who have a similar composition and volume of capital are "classes on paper" (Crossley, 2014: 90). However, for Bourdieu these groups of people do not necessarily constitute classes in real life based on the idea that to associate themselves with a class people must to some degree form a collective and identify with each other. Thus, people who are in

a similar position in abstract social space are more likely to meet based on similar tastes and have thus a higher probability to identify with each other and to form a class in real life (Crossley, 2014). The propensity of people in a proximate position in social space to apply a similar cultural logic when choosing certain items has been referred to as logic of association with regard to items seen as matching, and logic of difference with regard to items that are not seen to go together (Moore, 2014).

Based on the mutually influencing relationship between field and habitus, places and practices within thus have the ability to indicate what type of capital and how much or little of it is desired and beneficial in a certain environment. As such the notion of symbolic capital indicates that it is not just about the amounts of capital that people possess but also that these types of capital and their volumes must be socially recognised in the spaces the people are in. In other words, the value placed on certain ways of being and living gives symbolic capital to individuals and groups maintaining their status in a certain space and legitimising their culture as the 'right type' of culture (Crossley, 2014). Bourdieu refers to similar cultural preferences as markers of distinction, a device through which clusters of individuals distinguish themselves from other groups and people. Symbolic struggle occurs when these different cultural practices become an object of conflict in which the legitimacy and perhaps also superiority of one culture over another is contested and renegotiated. The concept of distinction thus refers to the ways in which people explain their actions in opposition to what other people do, who are not part of the group (Moore, 2014). Taste and through it "aesthetic distancing" (Bourdieu, 2004: 34) is an important component of this process that uses culture as a way to create detachment to the perceived others. Bourdieu argues that taste is then a social positioning device and an "acquired disposition to 'differentiate' and 'appreciate' [...] to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction" (2004: 466). Taste is therefore a major element in the display of symbolic capital and in the process of identifying with others but also distinguishing oneself from them (Jenkins, 1992). Everyday life and its social spaces are the field of the reproduction and (de)valorisation of tastes which enforce group membership but also distancing and conflict between individuals of opposing groups (Holt, 1997).

Connecting processes of distinction to urban life, Harvey (1992: 79) argued that the city is a primary place where objects and symbols communicating distinction can be found and acquired and place promotion is as much about creating an “‘aura’ of distinction” as it is about the building and maintenance of physical spaces (Miles et al., 2004: 99). In this thesis, I will not refer any further to the notions of habitus, field, class and capital since the main reason for introducing them here was to show how distinction is a process in which symbolic, economic and cultural capital is used to create distance between people and how the acquisition of this type of capital is tied to the concepts of habitus and field and ultimately also class. In the analysis section of this thesis I will discuss how in their quest to seek out student-only housing and leisure spaces in the city, students’ practices are very much characterised by notions of distinction especially with regard to a desired distancing from the practices of local populations. Essential to this process is that students do not just distinguish themselves in terms of what they do but also with regard to the spaces in which certain practices take place and the times in which these spaces are used. The spatial and temporal character of practices of distinction will be discussed in a later chapter with regard to students’ housing decisions, their involvement in nightlife but also in terms of their general engagement with the city.

### Studying Culture in Place

Contemporary studies of urban cultures in place often come in the shape of qualitative research situated in a specific locality and focusing on a particular group of people (e.g. Back, 2004; Beazley, 2004; Shields, 2004; Aguilar-San Juan, 2013; Hubbard et al., 2015). Analyses of groups’ behaviour and sense-making in reference to the concept of distinction can form an important component of this type of research as for instance, shown by Back (2004) who studied white men identifying with ‘black culture’ but struggling to meet all of the markers of distinction of this culture that they see as their own. In accounts of culture as a way of life, place and the social life it allows for is an important element based on the idea that how cultures can play out is dependent on contested meanings of place. For instance, Shields (2004) explores how historically Brighton has been established as a place for

pleasure and the carnivalesque attracting certain cultures and associated social practices. As already argued previously, the involvement of city governments in establishing certain ways and representations of social life in place is problematic in that it seems to demarcate the desirability and superiority of certain cultures and their practices in a particular area. Hubbard et al. (2015) discuss how certain representation of sexualities such as 'gay districts' become commodified through being bound up in place marketing and promotion strategies and Aguilar-San Juan (2013) explores the limits to the attempts of two American city governments in establishing areas for Vietnamese communities. Ultimately, conflicts over place meanings also relate to questions of how people associate to place and to which degree they are able to resist political ideas of what certain places are for and about, an argument for instance, implied by Beazley (2004) in her research of how homeless children in Indonesia create a sense of belonging around their lives on particular streets.

Several scholars have emphasised the importance of focusing on the lived experiences of individuals and groups to illuminate something about how global processes (such as urban entrepreneurialism) play out locally (Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Stevenson, 2003; Massey, 2007, Hubbard, 2011). In tune with her conception of the place-space relationship, Massey (2007) points out how in research a focus on meta-narratives can compromise the discovery of local variations to global trends and she supports the notion of locality studies as an analysis of a particular place based on the idea that the exploration of such is always influenced by but in turn also influences the meta-narratives it builds on. Hall and Hubbard make a similar point with regard to the focus on specific localities in arguing that "'localness' is too important a dimension to overlook in the study of the emergence of entrepreneurialism in cities across the world" (1998: 103). The importance of studying specificities of broader processes is at the forefront of these accounts. Focusing on how members of a group create meaning in and around the urban environment through their everyday life is a fundamental starting point of my research. As shown in this chapter, some of the research on culture and lived experiences in cities has focused on how individuals create meaning around the



urban environment in their everyday life. Rather than looking at cities from a structural perspective (for instance, by studying the nature of capitalism in urban economies), I employ an approach that analyses actions, interactions and experiences of individuals and groups and how they are made sense of.

My research explores how undergraduate students create a sense of place in Liverpool as their university city and has to be situated within the space-place relationship and the concept of the entrepreneurial city. It has been argued previously that the commissioning of images representing a specific version of a city and social reality is an important component of place marketing strategies employed by city councils to attract all sorts of 'desired' people and investment. Students are one group of people these images are supposed to attract and increasingly private companies catering for students but also universities commission the production of these types of images in order to advertise the city and their services within (Jones and Pötschulat, nd.). The underlying logic for this is that student populations are regarded as key contributors to a city's economic development who might become part of creative economies after graduation (Atkinson and Easthope, 2008) and who give cities a cosmopolitan character that attracts more visitors and investors (Van den Berg and Russo, 2004; Russo et al., 2007; Russo and Sans, 2009).

Students are also bound up with urban entrepreneurialism due to the character and practices of the universities they attend. Higher Education Institutions (HEI from now on) are increasingly run in a managerial style using controversial measurements to quantify the performance of their 'staff' and its effectiveness in attracting funds and profit to the institution (Ibrahim, 2011; McGettigan, 2013). Furthermore, students increasingly rely upon either private capital or income contingent repayment loans to be able to finance their tuition fees – typically £9000 per year – and their maintenance costs. More will be said about the notion of the 'neoliberal university' in the next chapter, suffice to say here that scholars have pointed towards various processes of commodification with regard to HE, whether that concerns university programmes, campus infrastructure or advertising practices (Smith and Holt, 2007; Chatterton, 2010; Ibrahim, 2011; Andersson et al., 2012; Holton and Riley, 2013; McGettigan, 2013).

The entanglement of students in entrepreneurial strategies does not just become visible when looking at the businesses model of universities but developments of student accommodation also point towards the commodification of student culture. Another aspect to this is students' contribution to urban night-time economies and images of city centres as places of 'youth' culture indicating symbolic economies which demarcate students' practices as the right type of culture (Chatterton, 1999; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). As a consequence it has been argued that students are powerful in influencing their environment and that student areas are being actively manufactured with a whole urban service sector moving in to cater for them (Smith and Holt, 2007; Chatterton, 2010; Collins, 2010). Much more will be said about each of these points in the next chapter exploring how student populations have become an important target of entrepreneurial activities. Their engagement with the city is characterised by the space-place relationship in the sense that national and international companies provide components of student life that are embedded and interpreted within a local context. Much could be made of research considering the dimensions of the student economy and the degree to which city councils and other actors are involved in the development of such. However, I am interested in notions of culture and specifically how student life within the entrepreneurial city is experienced by students and how they create a sense of place in this environment.

## 2.4. Conclusion

A central aim of this chapter was to situate theories of place in relation to the study of social groups and their practices. Several conceptions of the space-place relationship were discussed in order to give a clearer understanding of the notion of place as it is used in this research. Contrary to seeing space and place as binary opposites or place as merely a component of space, I argued for Doreen Massey's understanding of a sense of place (Massey, 2007). According to her, space can also be local and meaningful based on the idea that global developments and processes impact upon – and are shaped by – local contexts in unique and specific ways. Therefore, studies of place help unpack the ways in which global processes play out in distinctly local ways. The study of the relationship between people and place, from

a phenomenological perspective, must then be grounded in explorations of lived experiences and perceptions of individuals in order to understand how they attribute meaning to an environment (Seamon and Sowers, 2008).<sup>7</sup>

The social practices that inscribe place with meaning also imply the recognition that the meanings of one particular area are diverse and contested. City governments are keen to create meanings of place, often through strategic place marketing practices such as the creation of images that imply a certain social reality in a space (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). The practice of place marketing is situated within the concept of the entrepreneurial city and the argument that a shift of how cities are governed occurred in which city councils increasingly promote growth and economic investment over the engagement with welfare concerns of local populations (Harvey, 1989). One of the main assumptions emerging from this perspective is that private sector actors are becoming increasingly more powerful in shaping cities and urban politics (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Since most of these actors are part of national or multi-national companies, entrepreneurial policies are situated right at the heart of the space-place discussion since they enable global processes to take hold in local contexts.

Associated with place promotion is the branding of sites as spectacular and out of the ordinary and the role of certain cultures in facilitating an image of cosmopolitanism. The notion of the tourist gaze (Urry, 2005) describes the centrality of the visibility of certain groups and some of their practices in attracting tourists. Through this concept, Urry (2005) points to the production of objectified cultural artefacts that are bound up in this process. The observation that only certain cultures are promoted and commodified in this way forms part of the notion of symbolic economies (Zukin, 1995). These dominant representations of urban life and cultures therein actively stimulate processes of in/exclusion by indicating which groups are welcome and which are not (Zukin, 1995). In recognition of the several meanings attributed to the term culture, it was noted that 'culture' as it is used in this research refers to a specific

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<sup>7</sup> The implications of a phenomenological methodology to the research of place and culture will be elaborated in a further chapter.

way of life of a social group and the practices this entails. In reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu (2004), culture can be established as a means of distinction through which people associate with each other and distinguish themselves from others. The concept of distinction therefore notes that individuals make sense of their choices in opposition to what other people choose. The city is a primary place where various forms of distinction can be observed.

The discussion of some key studies on urban cultures showed that research on culture as a way of life can focus on one or a few social groups situated in a specific place. In this research I am interested in studying how cultural groups are embedded in place and make sense of such, through an analysis of lived experiences. Many aspects of the lives of students in cities can be positioned within discussions of urban entrepreneurialism and the place-space relationship within. Students have been conceptualised as drivers of entrepreneurial cities because their presence can stimulate investment and development, for instance, through the creation of student accommodation or through students' participation in night-time economies. Furthermore, as I will discuss in a later chapter, students consume the cities they live in, not only by spending money but also by visually and symbolically consuming its spaces and objects. In the next chapter, I will explore in more detail how students' engage with the university city in reference to existing research on the topic.

## CHAPTER 3

### Students in Cities

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the relationship between space and place and how this plays out in the context of the entrepreneurial city with a specific focus on the role of culture in creating place meanings. Discussions of student culture and how they create a sense of place have to be situated within this economic and symbolic context which has implications for their practices, their understanding of what it means to be a student and the places in which these ideas are enacted. Universities are key players in contributing to urban entrepreneurial policies for several reasons. Universities are not just seen as key institutions for the development of so called 'knowledge economies' but they have also been conceptualised as major contributors to local and regional economic growth (Goddard and Vallance, 2011). Universities are often strongly linked to their locality and can impact it in multiple ways, whether that is on a physical, economic, social or cultural level. The main impact on place that has been ascribed to universities refers to their role as employers, consumers, property developers and place makers (Russo et al., 2007; Russo and Sans, 2009; Goddard and Vallance, 2013).

In many cases, universities are one of the biggest employers in their respective cities covering a range of different jobs and pay scales. Even when universities outsource activities (e.g. facility or construction services) or buy rather than produce necessary products (e.g. office supplies, event catering) they tend to do so within the locality they are situated in and thus their consumption also has a more indirect effect on employment and economic growth in the region (Goddard and Vallance, 2013). One of the most visible effects of a university in the city is its physical presence (either on a campus or through a more dispersed urban set up) and its impact on the built environment. Universities are major property developers and drive physical urban change in multiple ways (Goddard and Vallance, 2013). In the past, universities have often been the main contractors of new buildings either for teaching and research purposes or for the development of student accommodation. While increasingly

universities work in partnership with private property developers or completely outsource the construction of necessary buildings through Private Finance Initiatives (PFI), they also indirectly impact the creation of speculative property development for instance in the shape of private halls and student accommodation (Chatterton, 2010; Goddard and Vallance, 2013; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). A large part of this chapter will discuss the implications of this entrepreneurial activity on local neighbourhoods and communities through an analysis of the concept of studentification. The final urban impact of universities has been attributed to the large number of students, visitors and academic staff that they attract to a place. Since universities usually only partly meet the consumption needs of these groups of people, it opens up multiple business opportunities for the private sector.

Although many of the impacts stated above can be found in official university documents and statements (e.g. University of Liverpool, 2015; Liverpool John Moores University, 2018), scholars have been critical of this arguing that universities often do not spark the type of economic and social regional development that is assigned to them (Smith, 2007; Goddard, 2009; Goddard and Vallance, 2011, 2013). Especially since the changes in government funding of HE have brought about the notion of the neoliberal university (as will be discussed in this chapter), it has rather been argued that universities enable entrepreneurialism on multiple levels: through their own business model and through facilitating the development of large-scale private sector activities in catering for the populations they attract to the city (Scanlon et al., 2007; Smith, 2007; Chatterton et al., 2010; Goddard and Vallance, 2013; McGettigan, 2013; Smith and Hubbard, 2014; Mountz et al., 2015). Therefore, similar to urban governments who are facilitating entrepreneurial strategies:

“[...] universities are key civic institutions engaged in a wide range of urban issues – business support, new enterprise formation, attracting inward investment, human capital development, health improvement, physical regeneration and place making, student housing and cultural production and consumption.”  
(Goddard and Vallance, 2013: 155)

Furthermore, it is not just the practices of universities that assist and contribute to urban entrepreneurialism but also the activities of those populations that universities attract profoundly fund entrepreneurial cities. As Hall and Hubbard have argued:

The political economy of higher education and the implications for the role of the academic are relevant to academic commentary on the entrepreneurial city, as some of the major players in entrepreneurial urban regimes are the very groups being courted by entrepreneurial universities. (1998: 318)

In this chapter, I provide an overview of academic research that has explored the factors that shape student lives and how these unfold in the urban environment. A key element of the context is the expansion of the HE system in the UK, initiated by the 1988 Education Reform Act and later also the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (McGettigan, 2013), which saw significant increases in student numbers and several challenges associated with this. For instance, despite initiatives like Widening Participation aiming to increase the number of students from working class backgrounds, for universities the principle of enabling 'everyone' access to HE and the necessary resources to complete a degree successfully remains a debated topic (e.g. Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Leese, 2010; Andersson et al., 2012). Furthermore, whereas traditionally universities in the UK have been the main providers of student accommodation (Silver, 2004), the significant increase in student numbers since the late 1980s has meant that universities needed to heavily rely on the private sector to balance out shortfalls in student accommodation. This has opened up a new and lucrative market for private sector developers and landlords who have spotted the profit potential connected to renting out residential space to student populations. However, it has also been argued that the supposed commodification of student lives has gone far beyond the residential sector and is highly visible on campus and other parts of the city which is why increasingly students are characterised as a powerful group in cities with the potential to strongly stimulate change in the urban environment (e.g. Holton and Riley, 2013; Smith et al., 2014; Kinton et al., 2016).

The remainder of this chapter will provide detail about the ways in which students can be characterised as powerful urban groups and how these dynamics influence their identification with the notion of 'the student'. The first section will look at residential patterns of students, specifically the phenomenon of 'studentification' and its associated consequences for neighbourhoods (for instance, in Smith, 2005;

Smith and Holt, 2007; Hubbard, 2008; Hubbard, 2009; Kenna, 2011; Holton and Riley, 2013; Smith et al., 2014; Smith and Hubbard, 2014) but also other types of research studying the impact of different types of accommodation on students' lives. In order to explore the commodification of student lifestyles further, the second part will analyse neoliberal shifts in politics and how an increasing commercialisation of the UK university system facilitates an ethos of consumerism amongst students that spatially and economically extends to the whole city. The third part will focus on theories concerned with the social development of young adults who leave their family home to attend university but also those who decide to continue living at home during this time period. The last section then looks at the broader implications of dynamics around student culture for cities with a specific focus on ideas around the commercialisation of infrastructure targeted at students especially nightlife and entertainment centres.

### 3.1. Studentification as a Residential Pattern

Student accommodation is the fastest growing property market in the UK (Hubbard, 2009) and the coinage of the term 'studentification' in a publication by Darren Smith in 2005 has sparked myriad research on the topic. Yet, already before 2005 scholars have explored and discussed the unique characteristics to the student housing market and how it influences people's understanding of what it means to be a student (e.g. Moffatt, 1991; Chatterton, 1999; Christie et al., 2002; Rugg et al., 2002, 2004; Read et al., 2003; Silver, 2004). About a decade after the coinage of the term studentification, it is claimed that these dynamics seem to exist in most UK university towns and that studentification can be regarded as "a leading process of urban change across the UK" (Smith et al., 2014: 125). Although most scholars have adopted the meaning of studentification as a purely residential pattern, it has been indicated that this definition might be too narrow and does not encompass other important aspects of student culture (Chatterton, 2010). Also other areas in the city which might not be primary locations of student living key into aspects of how students make and relate to place and could be considered to be 'studentified'. Although I will be



exploring this angle further, for the sake of clarity in what follows I employ the notion of studentification as a purely residential dynamic.

Studentification is conceived of as the formation of student clusters through the re-designation of single family housing into HMO by small-scale landlords (Smith, 2005). Several geographical patterns have been associated with studentification; for instance, the proximity of studentified areas to universities<sup>8</sup> but also the geographic closeness of studentified areas to gentrified middle class neighbourhoods has been pointed out (Smith, 2005; Allinson, 2006; Sage et al., 2012a and 2012b). More will be said about the connection between studentification and gentrification below but it should be pointed out here that the observation regarding the spatial proximity of gentrified and studentified neighbourhoods should be considered with caution as other studies have described processes of studentification in poor and marginalised communities far away from wealthier neighbourhoods (Sage et al., 2012a). The conversion of single-family, terraced housing into HMO, as described in the original definition, has later been conceptualised as the first wave of studentification in order to accommodate the development of PBSA as the second wave, a development encompassing almost all areas of the city, from the city centre to the suburbs and in doing so revealing new geographical patterns to the presence of students in cities (Smith, 2005).

The transformational character of large student populations moving into an area with established communities has been explained in detail by Smith (2005). As studentification typically describes the process of the in-migration of young adults connected by shared cultural tastes and lifestyles, changes in the infrastructure which increasingly targets students rather than other people in the local population follow. Accordingly, the influx of students also has impacts on the physical environment of a neighbourhood. An initial upgrading of the houses is often followed by physical decline of the area during the course of the tenancy based on the observation that some student households are less rigorous in their housekeeping and associated

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<sup>8</sup> This is an observation which has been explained by the cancelation of the daily travel allowance by the national government in the 1990s (Allinson, 2006).

chores than other residents in the neighbourhood. However, economically the decline of the physical appearance of the area does not cause a drop in HMO property prices because it is profitable to rent a house to several occupants rather than a single household only. The associated decreasing owner-occupation in studentified neighbourhoods connected to a lacking sense of responsibility towards the neighbourhood is often seen by residents as one of the main reasons for the deteriorating state of the area. Socially then, all of these transformations contribute to changes in the population dynamics of the area, triggering an out-movement if not even displacement of established residents (Smith, 2005).

Considering the element of neighbourhood change further, besides the declining visual appearance of the area and the noise disturbances reported by residents, it has also been argued that the ways in which students run their households go against the established community order and weaken neighbourly support structures, giving non-student residents the feeling of living in a “dormitory town” (Sage et al., 2012a: 1068). Other scholars have been pessimistic about the potential to build up a new community spirit with students due to the observation that most of them only stay in a neighbourhood for one or two academic years (Allinson, 2006). In making this argument, Allinson assumes that time is a necessary component of community building and that the period that students spend in an area is not sufficient to further this. While this is a debateable perspective, he points out that the negative effects associated with studentification will stay the same over time but will involve different student actors (Allinson, 2006). Yet, scholars have also pointed towards a few positive developments brought about by the presence of large student populations for instance, the regeneration of local retail and leisure infrastructure as well as improvements in the overall connectivity of the neighbourhood due to a better provision of public transport (Sage et al., 2012a). While the accounts and typologies of Smith (2005) and other scholars provide an important context to the discussion regarding the conflicts that revolve around student accommodation, in this research I approach the debate from the perspective of lived experiences and practices of students.

## HMO Regulation and Community Policy

Historically, the Right-to-Buy Policy introduced by Margret Thatcher which allows tenants of council-provided housing to buy their homes has been attributed to be one of the main causes for HMO over-concentration since student properties tend to be houses bought up through this policy and then resold to other parties (Smith, 2011; Sage et al., 2012b). In some cities, the perceived negative consequences of studentification have been so severe that a National HMO Lobby formed concerned about the effects of HMO concentrations on neighbourhoods and communities. Since students have the biggest share in HMO usage they are mainly alarmed by student house shares (Smith, 2008). While the lobby fights for the recognition of studentification processes by central government, their demands have ultimately been opposed by the government and stakeholders like the National Student Union who are concerned about students being scapegoated (Smith, 2008). These actors argue that studentification is received differently in every community and therefore it should be up to the local authorities to deal with potentially negative consequences within the existing legal framework for instance, the Housing Act 2004. Interestingly also some academic research has shown that not every community with larger student populations seems to experience the same negative effects as others (Allinson, 2006; Sage, Smith and Hubbard, 2012a). This aspect has been a bit of a mystery ever since and caused the emergence of the idea that there must be a tipping point after which communities with student residents become unbalanced (Hubbard, 2008 and 2009; Smith, 2008).

The Housing Act in 2004 gave local authorities the power to monitor and register HMO, yet, the act itself and subsequent documents are using a very specific definition, only comprising three-storey houses with at least five occupants (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007; Smith, 2008). This means that a large proportion of student HMO go unregistered. Another demand by the National HMO Lobby was that changes to the Use Classes Order are made since currently a conversion from a family dwelling to an HMO<sup>9</sup> does not require planning

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<sup>9</sup> In the Use Classes Order this would mean a conversion from category C3 to C4.

permission (Smith, 2008). In summary then, one of the main issues around HMO is the laissez-faire policy of central government in which HMO operate in an unregulated market and go largely unregistered and unlicensed which makes it impossible to determine the point in time in which neighbourhoods might become unbalanced (Smith, 2005). However, city councils are not completely powerless since Article 4 Directions gives them the authority to remove permitted development rights such as those declared in the Use Classes Order (Smith et al., 2014; Viitanen and Weatherall, 2014). Furthermore, in the backdrop of an absence of a national policy towards studentification-induced neighbourhood change, it was also suggested that so called ASHOREs, Areas of Student Housing Restraint, could be identified in local plans which would then discourage the development of student housing in these areas (Hubbard, 2008; Smith, 2008). Whereas a city like Leeds has picked up on the idea of ASHOREs (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2008: 26) other cities like Newcastle have decided to designate neighbourhoods as Areas of Housing Mix (AHM) arguing that this type of development is not per se against students but still supports the development of housing for different types of people (Newcastle City Council, 2008).

At the centre of the debates around HMO legislation and licensing is the idea to protect local non-student communities from the negative effects of studentification and to empower them with regard to the development of their neighbourhood. Several scholars have studied ideas around community participation and involvement in local politics and particularly the potential role of planners in facilitating this dialogue (e.g. Forester, 1989; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). Some scholars have looked specifically at what is often referred to as the 'geography of HE' focusing on the aspect of how residents cope with living in studentified areas (e.g. Holton and Riley, 2013; Rogaly and Taylor, 2015; Griffiths and Best, 2016; Long, 2016). Ultimately however, it is pointed out that issues of studentification refer to residents (student and non-student) and local authorities as much as they do to universities. Whereas a report by Universities UK (2006) has pointed out several best practice examples with

regard to universities' involvement in residential issues<sup>10</sup>, the idea of university-community partnerships or even the public/civic university' remains a debated topic (Bunnell and Lawson, 2006; Goddard, 2009; Goddard and Vallance, 2011, 2013).

### Learning to Be a Gentrifier?

In academic research, the concept of studentification has been linked to gentrification theory arguing that on the surface several parallels between the two processes might be drawn but the exact ways in which studentification could be linked to gentrification are unclear (Sage et al., 2012b). However, in these discussions it still becomes apparent that studentification can only be accommodated in this theory with difficulty. In reference to Zukin's (1989) description of gentrification and the entanglement of artists and their practices in this process, students might resemble depictions of marginal gentrifiers in terms of their possession of 'cultural capital' vis-à-vis assumption about low economic resources.<sup>11</sup> Yet, usually students' impact on their neighbourhood does not stimulate the in-movement of people with more economic capital (Smith, 2005). Students tend to occupy furnished houses on a temporary basis and have thus been argued to be comparatively inactive in transforming or improving their accommodation and immediate surroundings, in contrast to marginal gentrifiers (Smith, 2005). Because of that, it has been claimed that rather they resemble later types of gentrifiers consuming ready-made housing provided by developers and landlords (Smith, 2005). Furthermore, studentification processes are also observable in marginalised and deprived areas and do not spark gentrification tendencies when de-studentification<sup>12</sup> takes place but tend to enhance the further deterioration of the area (Sage et al., 2012a).

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, the University of Leeds is mentioned for setting up a neighbourhood helpline responding to residents' concerns about noise and environmental disturbances (2006: 24) or the three universities in Manchester are mentioned for setting up a not-for-profit housing agency for students which is accountable to the community (2006: 27).

<sup>11</sup> Here, the money received from parents or through loans should not be underestimated.

<sup>12</sup> Understood as the large out-movement of student populations.

However, with reference to the development of PBSA, defined as larger complexes of apartments typically comprising three or more bedrooms with communal living areas (Kenna, 2011), it has been argued that the connection between gentrification and student-induced residential change should be reconsidered (Smith and Holt, 2007). PBSA developments are subject to complex negotiations between universities (who are often unable to meet the demand for housing from their own student body), commercial providers building and renting out the accommodation, and the local authority who might view PBSA as an investment in the city and the best solution to disperse students and relieve pressure from heavily studentified areas (Hubbard, 2009). Yet, in contrast to this logic, a case study in Brighton has shown that the development of PBSA in formerly un-studentified neighbourhoods has labelled the area as suitable for students and by doing so facilitated their in-movement into the neighbourhood either settling down in PBSA or HMO adjacent to it (Sage et al., 2013). Additionally, the streets and neighbourhoods in-between PBSA and studentified HMO neighbourhoods start to experience some of the negative aspects associated with studentification since students use them as a physical connection between the two (Sage et al., 2013). It is especially the gated character of PBSA developments that has received criticism due to creating blank house fronts which stand in contrast to the rest of the neighbourhood, effectively creating a closed environment for students to socialise amongst themselves only (Holton and Riley, 2013; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). In this debate, it is also the design and architecture of PBSA that has been argued to be insensitive to the local context and to reduce the chances for positive interactions between students and established residents (Kenna, 2011).

Indeed, the development of PBSA is in close connection to debates around new-built gentrification. Although new-built residential developments clearly do not involve the renovation of an old housing stock – as per classic definitions of gentrification (Glass, 1964; Butler and Lees, 2006; Slater, 2006, 2011; Lees et al., 2013) – Davidson and Lees (2005 and 2010) argue that aesthetically they still produce a gentrified landscape and change the class structure of an area as well as inducing displacement. Against this backdrop, it has been pointed out that PBSA can also be interpreted along the lines of gentrification in terms of inducing neighbourhood change and increasing

the spatial segregation of different social groups on the basis of age and class. More broadly it has been argued that “studenthood itself is being effectively gentrified” (Hubbard, 2009: 1904) because developers and landlords have identified a taste pattern to students’ residential choices. By living in studentified spaces students arguably develop a residential taste for living amongst people like them and it is hypothesised that this preference for a withdrawal from other members of the neighbourhood might become amplified in later life stages (Smith and Holt, 2007). Because of that students have been conceptualised as “apprentice gentrifiers” (Smith and Holt, 2007) with studentified neighbourhoods as their training ground.

### ‘Halls to Housing’ Trajectories

Beyond the literature on studentification, other studies have researched students’ residential patterns for instance, by looking at students’ satisfaction with their term time homes (Thomsen, 2007; Amole, 2009) or aspects around de-studentification and considerations of residential patterns of graduates (Smith and Holt, 2007; Kinton et al., 2016). In this body of literature it is specifically discussions of the importance of first year halls in the transition to becoming students or analyses of residential trajectories that are of specific interest for my research. Holton (2014b) describes how halls of residence are often seen as the best environment for ‘fresh’ students to manage the transition from leaving the parental home to go to university. For many students, halls of residence are the first university environment they encounter and are important spaces for building support networks and friendships (Andersson et al., 2012). Because of that, prospective students have high expectations of halls as socialising environments in which they meet people who are likely to strongly shape their time at university and with whom substitute family ties are formed (Wilcox et al., 2005).

At the same time, halls have been described as a student bubble and homogenous environments favouring some type of interactions over others and thereby bearing the potential of being exclusionary places (Holton and Riley, 2014; Holton, 2014b). For instance, halls have been characterised as spaces where “hyper-hetero

masculinities” play out and that the cramped design of these spaces makes it difficult for students who do not get along with their flatmates to limit their interactions with them (Taulke-Johnson, 2010). Because of the importance attributed to first-year housing and the physical design allowing little privacy, halls have the potential to cause struggles amongst students failing to socialise for whatever reason and have the potential to negatively influence the quality of their degree (Holton, 2014b).

While only very few scholars have started to look at the lived experiences of student residents in their accommodation, increasingly literature can be found which is conducting an analysis of students’ housing biographies (sometimes also referred to as housing careers, pathways or trajectories), based on the idea that students’ residential decisions are crucial for how they experience university. It has been argued that traditional housing trajectories of UK students show a specific pattern with regard to starting off in university-managed halls of residence and then moving on into the private sector (Holton, 2014b; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). Students’ housing biographies have been argued to be distinct from other pathways taken by non-student adults because while students leave the parental home early they tend to return frequently and for longer periods of time (for instance, over the summer break) (Christie, et al., 2002; Rugg, et al., 2004; Holton, 2015a). Although Holton argues that these patterns create “highly individualised ‘biographies’ of the city” (2015a: 28), the research on studentification identifying the taste pattern of students to live amongst people like them, would rather hint at the idea that the progression to the private sector is a common step creating predictable rather than individualised spatial patterns. This research in part aims to make sense of students’ residential decisions and perceptions of their living environments.

### 3.2. The Neoliberal University

The discussion with regard to processes of studentification and the significance of housing in students’ lives emphasises the importance of exploring the spatial implications of HE in relation to the specific geographical patterns of students in the city (Munro et al., 2009). While most of the studentification literature focuses on the



UK, the phenomenon has been researched in several other countries.<sup>13</sup> Silver (2004) has argued that the provision of student accommodation has for centuries been an important part of how universities defined themselves. Educational ideas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century foregrounded how “to discipline the crowd of arrogant young gentleman who were flocking in” (Silver, 2004: 125). Further, the recognition after the Second World War was that students needed accommodation outside of their family homes which were too cramped and far away (Silver, 2004). However, current studentification processes in the UK are taking place in the context of the massification of HE and increasing free market constraints on universities, through which the private sector is able to enter spheres previously crucial to a university’s overall mission statement.

Tied to the expansion of the HE system is the observation that university models are increasingly dependent on private sector funding from within the country and overseas as well as philanthropic donations and students’ tuition fees (Chatterton, 2010; McGettigan, 2013; Smith and Hubbard, 2014).<sup>14</sup> Especially in reference to the Browne Review in 2010 which lifted the cap on tuition fees to a maximum of £9,000, scholars have argued that a process called the “neo-liberalisation of education” is taking place (Holton and Riley, 2013: 61). At the heart of this development is an institution that they refer to as the ‘neoliberal university’ which emphasises economic aspects to the delivery of education (Scanlon et al., 2007; Chatterton et al., 2010; Mountz et al., 2015). The notion also implies that universities are run in a managerial style, evaluating its academic employees on performance indicators and effectiveness in generating more profit (Ibrahim, 2011; McGettigan, 2013). As argued in the previous chapter, in this thesis neoliberalism is broadly understood as the attempt to enforce the rule of the market on increasingly more aspects of social life.

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, in Australia (Atkinson and Easthope, 2008; Fincher and Shaw, 2011), China (He, 2015), Germany (Wiest and Hill, 2004), Hungary (Fabula et al., 2015), Israel (Baron and Kaplan, 2011), New Zealand (Collins, 2010), Poland (Murzyn-Kupisz and Szmytkowska, 2015), South Africa (Ackermann and Visser, 2016) and Spain (Garmendia et al., 2012).

<sup>14</sup> For instance, the inability to fulfil the demand for student accommodation is compensated by Private Finance Initiative, in which the university only leases properties from the private sector and adds them to the university facilities (Goddard and Vallance, 2013; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). A similar process has been observed in the provision of English language courses achieved through joint ventures with private language schools (Chatterton, 2010).

As pointed out by Brenner and Theodore (2002) this process causes all sorts of spatial and social inequalities and also, counter-intuitively, necessitates “strong forms of state intervention in order to impose the rule of the free market on all aspects of life” (2002: 352). As indicated above, HE is a primary example of this contradiction since it is a field that is heavily reliant on state intervention and policy in order to be opened up to the free market.

In his book *The Great University Gamble* Andrew McGettigan (2013) suggests that the new university system after the Browne Review constitutes an economically risky bet because of the way it is financed through ‘income contingent repayment loans’.<sup>15</sup> He refers to this practice as an accounting trick because the expenditure from the loans is actually higher than the amount of money saved through the cuts but in the government’s accounts, loans are not treated as expenditure. Thus, on paper it seems that the financial gap was closed when in reality it might even be larger than before (McGettigan, 2013). The main problem with this concerns the repayment conditions with regard to the difference between the borrowed and actual amount of money paid back but this difference will only become apparent in just under thirty years when the first cohort of students will reach the end of their repayment cycle.<sup>16</sup> Essentially then, McGettigan (2013) argues that this system introduces risk by shifting the funding problem into the far future for upcoming governments to deal with. It constitutes a temporal deferral rather than actually being able to fill any financial deficits. As such these loans are not just risky for governments but also for students since they are subject to interest rates and the government reserves the right to change the repayment conditions at any time (McGettigan, 2013: 49). Because of this, loans and tuition fees are politically a much debated topic, forming part of

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<sup>15</sup> The repayment threshold in 2013 (as well as 2016) was at an annual income of £21,000. 9% of everything above this threshold will have to go towards repaying the debt. Thirty years after the first payment is due the balance will be cleared if it has not been repaid (McGettigan, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> The first cohort of students who paid tuition fees of £9,000 graduated in 2015. If the students meet the threshold, the earliest starting date for their repayment cycle is in April the year after they have graduated (McGettigan, 2013). That means that the first cohort of students has started to pay back their debt in April 2016. It is very unlikely that there will not be any changes to this system for the next thirty years but hypothetically the full effect of the income contingent repayment loans could only be evaluated in 2046.

central campaign claims, as seen for instance, in the ‘snap’ election of 2017 in which the Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn advocated their abolition (Labour, 2017).<sup>17</sup>

The shift in the tuition fee and loan system can also be interpreted as the commodification of HE, rendering students as consumers of services (McGettigan, 2013). The involvement of the private sector in the delivery of services formerly provided by universities has resulted in student life being increasingly packaged and commodified (Smith and Holt, 2007). Students are now seen as customers with study indebtedness as a normal aspect to student life (Chatterton, 2010). This commodification of student life is observable in the built environment of campuses for instance, through the presence of café franchises and university merchandise shops and attempts towards “prettifying the campus” in order to ensure that prospective students get the best possible impression on open days (McGettigan, 2013: 61-62).<sup>18</sup>

In retrospect, when considering student activism such as the famous Columbia University protest in 1968 or the more recent 2014 protest of Hong Kong students, it could be argued that campuses have traditionally been sites in which debates about citizenship, democracy and inequalities take place, with the mobilisation of people towards political action as a norm. The idea of facilitating students as political actors is not foreign to the UK either, considering the student protests in 2010/2011 which saw students opposing the recommendations of the Browne Review and the adoption by the government, not because they were affected by the changes financially but in order to defend the principle of education as a public good (Ibrahim, 2011). However, the increasing commercialisation of campuses stands in strong

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<sup>17</sup> Recently, controversy developed around this claim because of uncertainties regarding the amnesty of accrued student debt. The argument is that if tuition fees are abolished this would leave a few cohorts of students with large amounts of debt only because they were unfortunate enough to enter university when the full effect of the recommendations of the Browne Review were in place. While this is certainly a social justice issue that would have had to be discussed in the event of a Labour win, it should also be pointed out that in their campaigning for the abolishment of tuition fees, the Labour Party did not make any statements or promises regarding existing student debt (Labour, 2017; Roberts, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> The attempt to create the best possible first impression can also be seen when looking at universities’ advertising material attempting to sell the university, the campus and the city it is situated in (Andersson et al., 2012).

contrast to universities as sites of activism and although student unions could be key locations for students and academics to meet and exchange ideas, they increasingly use their facilities for commercial purposes and by doing so capitalise on the notion of the student as a consumer (Andersson, et al., 2012; Brooks et al., 2016). Through organising freshers' fairs in which stalls of political organisations are situated right next to stalls of commercial companies and leisure groups they arguably facilitate the idea that activism and a political interest *per se* is yet just another lifestyle choice for new undergraduate students.

Connected to the debates about the neoliberalisation of universities in the UK is the observation of an 'internationalisation of HE' specifically with regard to the recruitment of international students (Holton and Riley, 2013). Since the Browne Review, no maximum fee cap has been introduced for international, so-called 'overseas', students (McGettigan, 2013), which means that in theory universities could ask for as much money as they wanted to and in practice tuition fees for international students in the UK tend to be significantly higher. Several scholars from the UK and Australia, have discussed some of the effects of the recruitment of international students specifically from Asian countries on universities and the surrounding environment (e.g. Chatterton, 2010; Collins, 2010; Holton and Riley, 2013; McGettigan, 2013). For instance, Haugh (2008) claimed that there seems to be the perception that some cohorts of international students contribute to falling levels of education standards because of insufficient language skills. Others have argued that there is evidence that Asian international students<sup>19</sup> rarely have intercultural friendships abroad and that clubs and societies on campus but specifically also the provided accommodation for these students tend to be based around language and nationality (Fincher and Shaw, 2011). Because of that, it has been claimed that university campuses can be described as "architecture of social difference" (Sidhu et al., 2016: 1510) in the sense that they facilitate segregation between different groups

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<sup>19</sup> Fincher and Shaw (2011) point out that Asian students are more likely to adopt the label of being 'international students' in contrast to for instance, students from the USA or Canada.

of students rather than encounters, an idea that will be picked up again later in reference to further practices of 'othering' on campus and in student communities.

### 3.3. Students' Social Journeys

It has been pointed out previously how in the past UK universities adopted a much more comprehensive role with regard to the education of their students, reaching beyond the delivery of academic content to also socialise them in how to be 'respectable citizens' (Silver, 2004). The state of being a student is described as the transition between dependent childhood and independent adulthood and has been conceptualised as the training ground to become a grown-up (Christie et al., 2002). Student life involves acquiring "a sense of 'ontological security' within unfamiliar social, cultural and spatial settings" and solving the conflicts that play out in this transitional phase (Smith and Holt, 2007: 151). In other words, being a student can also be understood as a liminality, characterising students in the middle stage of rituals in which they are not part of the pre-stage anymore but have also not fully completed them (Chatterton, 1999). This section will look more closely at research which engages with students' sense-making of the transition to university and the adoption of practices understood to be part of this specific phase in their lives. While numerous scholars have referred to these inquiries as studies of student identities (e.g. Smith, 2005; Scanlon et al., 2007; Haugh, 2008; Holton, 2015a), in this research I will not use the term identity based on the belief that the elusive nature of the term complicates the argument (Hall, 1992, 2011; Moran, 2014a).

#### Learning to be a Student

The transition towards attending university has been described as an emotional experience in which students are faced with a perceived lack of knowledge of how to behave and show insecurities with regard to negotiating this new lifestyle (Read et al., 2003; Chow and Healey, 2008; Christie et al., 2008; Christie, 2009). A number of academics have used Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field in order to investigate the ways in which students learn to come to terms with this new phase in their lives

(e.g. Chatterton, 1999; Rugg et al., 2004; Crozier et al., 2008; Holdsworth, 2009; Leese, 2010; Abrahams and Ingram, 2013; Holton and Riley, 2013; Holton, 2015b). It is important to note that the acculturation into student life starts before entering university, through the exposure to the experiences of friends and relatives and media representation of stereotyped ideas of what it means to be a student (Chatterton, 1999). These accounts, together with first hand experiences of student life at for instance, welcome weeks, freshers' fairs or publications from student unions, can strongly shape students' ideas about what is supposed to happen during this period.

Chatterton distinguishes between two phases of "learning the rules of the student game" (1999: 120). In the first phase students tend to be engaged in activities seen as typical and mainly revolving around branded student spaces in the city, influenced by the limited presentation of other urban spaces in for instance, freshers' fairs. This period is followed by a phase in which some students distance themselves from the behaviour of the next cohort of freshers, by frequenting new places in the city and engaging with the different publics present there. Based on the idea that students can be considered to go through a period of experimentation, Holton also notes this development with his participants who spoke of "year one providing a platform for them to learn to *become* students, subsequent years allowed them to relax into *being* students" (2015a: 27). During this process, Holton (2015a) mentions the development of routines as well as the engagement with practices students were familiar with from their home environment as important components in settling down and feeling a sense of cohesion.

Overall, from the perspective of students there seems to be the assumption that university is about much more than just academic activities<sup>20</sup> and because of that it has been argued that the establishment of social contacts is crucial to how students perceive their engagement with student life (Holdsworth, 2006; Chow and Healey, 2008; Holton, 2015a). The initial learning of what it means to be a student through

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<sup>20</sup> Another interesting account is provided by Moffatt (1991) who makes a very similar point about college life in the US with regard to the importance of fun and experiencing the last stages of adolescence in attending university.

interacting with rather typical representations of student culture is an important step for the establishment of new social relationships with fellow students who are in similar life circumstances. Furthermore, it has been argued that residential decisions should be seen in a similar way in the sense that living in halls fosters social attachment between students due to this shared experience (Smith and Holt, 2007) and living in HMOs in studentified neighbourhoods further facilitates this feeling of belonging to a community (Smith, 2005; Holton, 2015b). The importance of socialising in the backdrop of the assumption that academic activities are only a marginal component of what it means to be a student will be crucial for the analysis of my data. Discussions with my participants about the prominence of for instance, traditional student spaces and typical housing situations and locations in developing social relationships indicates the importance of place in learning what it means to be a student.

### The 'Ideal' Student

The expansion of the HE sector, the accreditation of former polytechnic institutions to universities and widening participation initiatives all caused an increasing diversification of the student population (Andersson et al., 2012). Discussions about students' engagement with stereotypical representations of student culture might give the impression that the 'student body' is some kind of homogenous group of young people when in effect often these accounts only refer to what Chatterton (1999) has characterised as the 'traditional student', defined to be white, 18 to 21 years of age, from a middle class background, who moved away from home to attend university. In spite of a focus on a specific type of student often fostered by the media and popular culture representations (Holton and Riley, 2013), research shows how students differ and how those who do not fit the criteria of traditional students experience difficulties in negotiating their sense of belonging to a student community (Read et al., 2003).

One of the aspects that has been studied extensively is the connection between class background and choice of university (Clayton et al., 2009; Lehmann, 2009; Mangan

et al., 2010; Bathmaker et al., 2013; Bradley and Ingram, 2013), with the finding that people from working class families are more likely to choose post-1992 universities than middle class people (Read et al., 2003; Leese, 2010; Abrahams and Ingram, 2013). This is attributed to the idea that 'new universities' tend to pay more attention to regional needs with regard to being more involved in local communities and economies than older ones (Hubbard, 2008) and the finding that working class students are more likely to study in close proximity to their home environment and thus have a limited choice (Mangan et al., 2010). In relation to the notion of the 'traditional student', several scholars have criticised the idea of the so-called 'new student', a term which refers to the increasing HE participation of people who are the first generation in their families to attend university (Leathwood et al., 2010). Others have studied the way working class students perceive the transition to university arguing that they are disadvantaged; attending university requires implicit knowledge about how to behave in this environment, something that working class people are more likely to lack and feel insecure about (Hird, 1998; Crozier et al., 2008; Walkerdine, 2011).

Despite the observation that increasingly more people decide to live at home while attending university, moving away from home or at least out of the parental house, is bound up with dominant ideas of what it means to be a student (Chatterton, 2010; Hinton 2011). Holdsworth (2009) argues that the aspect of mobility is so intrinsic to student culture that universities find it necessary to not just advertise their educational choice but also their geographical location in order to make it attractive to students who are not from the area. In these representations, the process of moving out of the parental home is seen as a major component to becoming independent and growing up and is also associated to the idea of 'constructing a new self' away from family and friends of past life phases. Whereas financial aspects have been mentioned as the main reason for prospective students to stay at home it has also been emphasised that maintaining family support as well as caring and work responsibilities are also some of the most prominent reasons for this (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). Several scholars have conducted in-depth studies about the experiences of students who did not move out to attend university arguing that there



is a general perception by these students that they are missing out on the full scope of student culture (Hinton, 2011; Abrahams and Ingram, 2013; Holton, 2015b). They have also expressed difficulties in merging their home and university life, in the sense that these two worlds and the people in it are often kept strictly separate (Holdsworth, 2009; Abrahams and Ingram, 2013). However, it has also been remarked that students who stay at home manage to establish a different sense of place in their home city because being a student gives them access to areas previously unknown or not used and thus makes them engage with new places in the city (Holton, 2014a).

Besides the aspects of class background and mobility, some scholars have looked at other ways in which students can potentially differ from the traditional image for instance, through interviews with mature students (Holton, 2015b), research into the experiences of students with Asperger's Syndrome (Madriaga, 2010) or through studies of sexuality (Taulke-Johnson, 2010: 413). However, despite that it has been argued that "the phantom of the 'normal' student within the classroom context persists" (Andersson et al., 2012: 504) and that students aspire to achieve this "normative 'student' experience" (Holdsworth, 2006: 496). Although some argue that ideally spending time at university should be a shared experience enabling students to mingle with people from other backgrounds and life phases (Chatterton, 1999), it has been claimed that ideas around being the "right kind of student" continue to be a basis of comparison for students in relation to their own experience of this time (Holdsworth, 2009: 230). This aspiration towards being an 'ideal student' can cause difficulties for people who do not fit into the category of the 'traditional student' but want to get a sense of fitting in and feeling part of a community (Holdsworth, 2006). The notion of the ideal student and the assumed aspiration to have a normative student experience will form a fundamental part of the data analysis in later chapters.

### 3.4. Students in the City

Omnipresent in discussions about the idea of the 'normal' student is the importance of place in establishing a sense of belonging to a student community. While the wider role of accommodation in relation to this has been researched widely and was discussed previously, surprisingly only a few scholars have looked at the implications of this for the city as a whole, although it has been argued that students can have strong effects on the urban areas they consume (Smith, 2009). Commodification of student lifestyles goes far beyond the campus and does not only encompass the development of private sector student accommodation (Hubbard, 2009), but can stimulate the growth of a whole urban service sector dedicated to students (Chatterton, 2010, Collins, 2010). Several scholars have looked at the idea that universities stimulate economic growth in their cities (e.g. Felsenstein, 1996; Chatterton and Goddard, 2000; Atkinson and Easthope, 2008; Goddard and Vallance, 2011; 2013). Especially important in this theory is the refutation of the 'students have no money'-myth because actually the income that students generate through loans, parental financial support and part-time jobs coupled with their willingness to spend substantial amounts of this on certain types of goods and services, makes them powerful actors in urban economies (Chatterton, 1999).

The commodification of student lifestyles goes beyond service providers and has gained importance in entrepreneurial strategies and practices of place promotion in which cities market themselves as vibrant and cosmopolitan through the presence of large student populations. City branding techniques emphasising a city's student population build on the notion that students are some kind of "creative and productive class *in utero*" (Atkinson and Easthope, 2008: 316) and will contribute to a city's economic development once they have graduated (Chatterton, 2010). These assumptions are based on the idea of a perceived virtuous circle in which students make a city more attractive and in doing so, draw in more students (Atkinson and Easthope, 2008). Within these branding techniques international students have received specific attention as entrepreneurial strategies emphasise their importance for the creation of an international image (Atkinson and Easthope, 2008; Collins,

2010). Although very little is known about how international students actually engage with their university cities (Holton and Riley, 2013),<sup>21</sup> the argument is that these students would contribute to so-called “ethnic economies” (Collins, 2010: 941). It has been claimed that their presence specifically influences the built environment with increasing amounts of expensive private sector accommodation in central areas of cities targeted at them. The notion that students give cities a competitive advantage through their contribution to creative industries is highly controversial and viewing students as some kind of “‘Floridian’ creative class” is problematic (Atkinson and Easthope, 2008: 316). There is little evidence for this especially when considering that the vast majority of international students study subjects in the fields of financing and commerce.

Next, I explore how students have been conceptualised as ‘urban agents’ and in which ways they influence but also engage with their urban surroundings. As such the following paragraphs will build on concepts and strategies such as urban entrepreneurialism or place promotion that were discussed in more detail in the previous chapter. Because research of this nature in connection to students is still fairly limited the work of only few scholars is cited and discussed here.

## Students in Urban Economies

In 2004, Antonio Russo together with Leo van den Berg explored the topic of students in cities based on their idea that “[s]tudent communities are without a doubt a strategic resource for urban development” (Van den Berg and Russo, 2004: viii). Drawing on several case studies of major European cities, in this book they argue that students are a somewhat invisible population for urban policy makers and they identify them as key contributors to a city’s housing market, infrastructure and economic development and claim that strategic action is necessary in order to capitalise more on these impacts (Van den Berg and Russo, 2004). This standpoint is

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<sup>21</sup> Fincher and Shaw (2011) for instance, have observed that in Melbourne Asian students seem to have different ideas about what constitutes a safe leisure space noting that their participants’ preferred to spend leisure time in enclosed, privatised and policed shopping malls.

emphasised further arguing that so called 'knowledge economies' give cities a competitive advantage based on ideas around the importance of creativity and the notion of 'knowledge spill over' (Russo et al., 2007; Russo and Sans, 2009). This term refers to the assumption that a large stock of educated and creative people are important for a city's development because of the idea that their presence contributes to the creation of a cosmopolitan character necessary to attract more people, knowledge, and capital into the city (Russo et al., 2007).

Russo and Tatjer (2007: 1161) conceptualise students as "agents of urban transformation" in between tourists and residents; they are a transient population but tend to stay longer than tourists. They define the notion of "studentscapes" with regard to the potential of students to create new urban environments based on their specific needs and activities (Russo and Tatjer, 2007: 1163). They refer to such sites as "temporary playgrounds" for students that are not just about education but are also the arena for various types of non-academic activities (Russo and Tatjer, 2010: 269). A further contribution of Russo and Tatjer (2007) is to be found in their geographical typology of university cities depending on the location of the university, the main residential areas and the main places for social life claiming that the most sustainable model of a university city integrates these three aspects in close proximity to each other but not in the same space.

The notion of 'studentscapes' with regard to the powerful role of students to influence the urban environment to adapt to their needs provides an important context for this research. Furthermore, the characterisation of students as somewhere in between local residents and tourists will be picked up again later in reference to John Urry's notion of the tourist gaze (2005) and Simmel's description of the stranger (2004). However, Russo et al. seem to sustain the narrative of the entrepreneurial city including the idea that economic development and investment is imperative for its future. In arguing that the visibility of student culture has to be promoted for place branding purposes in order to attract more visitors and capital they also advocate a position that is contested through the concept of symbolic economies (Zukin, 1995). My general impression from their work is that it somewhat uncritically theorises the role of place promotion in attracting capital, and shows little

sensitivity to some of the problems associated with practices of in/exclusion and the commercialisation of cultures that accompany such.

### Studying Students' Lived Experiences

Mark Holton has published extensively on the topic of students' practices in cities (Holton, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Holton and Riley, 2013, 2014 and 2016). He attempted to access students' perceptions and lived experiences through conducting web-based questionnaires and walking interviews with them, arguing that "more research that takes us into the everyday 'lifeworlds' of students and in particular into the non-institutional spaces" is necessary (Holton and Riley, 2013: 69). One of his central points of interest revolves around patterns and perceptions of student accommodation. For instance, he notes the importance of first-year halls in making students feel part of a student community but also mentions that this type of 'membership' to the community needs to be regularly sustained through engaging in social activities (Holton, 2014b). Further, he looks at the notion of students' housing trajectories, something that he refers to as a "home to halls to rented housing" pattern (2016: 2). He claims that halls constitute a natural progression from the family home but criticises the homogenous nature of these spaces which increase the potential for interaction for those who fit in but makes it difficult for others from non-traditional backgrounds (Holton, 2014b). In reference to practices of landlordism giving preference to bed-spaces over communal areas, he also investigates students' homemaking practices studying the interactions that take place between the individual, the flatmates and residential space (Holton and Riley, 2016; Holton, 2016).

A further interest relates to how students create a sense of place, so the ways in which they engage with the urban environment and how spaces are temporarily included into student lives but can also be rejected from these later. With regard to students who have moved to their university city, Holton and Riley (2014) note that the participants' use of urban space can be strongly influenced by their peers and group activities. Furthermore, the places used for socialising seem to be subject to temporal hierarchies, in the sense that specific periods in a student's life and the

people that come with it are also associated to specific places in the city. Once these periods have passed also the spatial practices change (Holton and Riley, 2014). In particular, Holton (2015a) notes that first-year students showed very limited knowledge of their university city, which usually just revolved around student-centric spaces. However, after their first year they strongly rejected these places and, coinciding with a move into rented accommodation, started experimenting with their city of residence. Yet, they continued a pattern in which their social activities would only take place in specific spaces in the city but Holton (2015a) observes how these activities and the places in which they are practices tend to change year after year. Several of the findings of Holton (and Riley) are of relevance for my research for instance, observations about students' housing trajectories or their engagement with the university city as a whole. These will be discussed further in relation to my findings in a later chapter.

### Students as Urban Consumers

In his in-depth study of student practices in the city, and how places of socialising and living are embedded in ideas of what it means to be a student, Holton brings together analysis of residential and leisure environments and shows how the meanings of these places are entangled with each other and are fluctuating over time. In contrast to this, the work of Paul Chatterton (1999, 2002, 2010; as well as Chatterton and Hollands, 2002 and 2004) focuses on city centres and nightlife activities and he provides a sharp account of how students are part of an influential consumer culture in cities and through the consumption of branded nightlife spaces contribute to night-time economies. He argues that students have a specific pattern in space and time that distinguishes them from the rest of a city's population. Connected to this, he identifies a distinctive time logic to nightlife places targeted at students which usually advertise events taking place during the week rather than the weekend (Chatterton, 1999). With regard to the distinctive spatial pattern, Chatterton (1999) notes a regulated movement of students through the city, creating distinctive pathways in which they move from one student space to the next. With regard to entertainment providers he explores the assumption that the needs of students can only be met in

separation to the needs of other city centre users, building on the notion of “‘studenthood’ as a different type of experience” and facilitating student lives as separate from the lives of non-students (Chatterton, 1999: 123).

In *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power* Chatterton and Hollands (2004) give an account of the commercialisation of themed urban nightlife venues and the role of student culture in this process. They use the term “studentland” in order to refer to the urban service sector targeted at them and the way in which leisure providers have identified students as cash-rich groups (Chatterton and Hollands, 2004: 126). Furthermore, they argue that despite the diversification of the student body, a specific stereotype of ‘the normal student’ persists and that the UK is very specific in the sense that it is seen as “an oasis of student hedonism where young people travel away from home to party for three years” (Chatterton and Hollands, 2004: 128). Therefore they argue that student life offers a very specific way of being and experimenting with a culture that is adopted and tried out for three years and then quickly discarded after students graduate from university.

Chatterton revisits the topic of the student city in 2010 studying the effects of students on urban “labour and housing markets, on the built environment and on community relations” (2010: 510). In this account he extends the idea of studentification in the sense that it also plays an active part in shaping city centres and not necessarily just residential spaces. Similarly to studentified residential areas, he argues that also the student urban service sector shows comparable characteristics with regard to its ownership patterns, its commercial nature and the way it is segregated from the activities of other people. Especially during night-time, centres of university cities have become sites for the practices of specific youth cultures, mainly incorporating students and young professionals (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). As a consequence, it is not just people who do not identify with youth cultures that have been excluded but also for other (mainly local) young people there has been less and less of a reason to frequent city centres when they are not able to consume the way other young adults are (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). Also Phil Hubbard (2013) comes to a similar conclusion in his study of Carnage, serial

drinking events organised in several UK university towns. He shows how the city centre is a contested space between various groups of people and how exclusions are bound up with aspects of age, gender, class and sexuality.

Postmodern accounts of the city can conceptualise it as an inclusive place for consumption and play, that is open to different types of people with various tastes, and serves to help them to reinforce who they are by consuming services, goods and places (Chatterton, 2002; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). With reference to student economies, Chatterton (1999) argues that city centres should rather be described in terms of creating divisions than consensus because of their potential to give one or a few groups the ability to claim the territory and monopolise it. Essentially this relates back to Zukin's notion of symbolic economies (1995) and her description of how some cultures come to dominate certain spaces. Student areas are being actively manufactured by private and public sector institutions creating distinct cultural spaces in cities, comparable to residential student enclaves (Smith and Holt, 2007).

Above it has been argued that studentified residential neighbourhoods can be understood as segregated from other populations, a situation compounded by the spatial consequences of students' leisure infrastructure. Chatterton (2010) argues that the segregated provision of student services in cities brings about geographies of exclusion by creating areas that are detached from the lives of other city residents. In this development it is not just student housing but also the student service sector that is "indicative of how neoliberal urban politics relies on processes of socio-spatial segregation to create opportunities for capital investment" (Smith and Hubbard, 2014: 95). From this perspective, one of the spatial outcomes of student infrastructure in university cities is its segregated nature but also its power to claim territory in these areas. This argument places student culture at the centre of entrepreneurial policies and symbolic economies as analysed in the previous chapter and specifically feeds into discussions about the exclusionary character of these types of strategies and practices.



### 3.5. Conclusion

The presence of university students in cities and the associated implications on the urban environment and other populations therein have been discussed extensively by scholars associated with various disciplines (e.g. sociology, planning, human geography and more). Students' residential patterns and specifically processes of studentification impact residential neighbourhoods in ways that carry the potential to cause conflicts and tensions between students and other residents. When neighbourhoods change to cater for the supposed needs of the student population, infrastructure for other residents (such as community centres, schools, local pubs) declines or shuts down. This process goes hand in hand with a changing cultural meaning associated to a residential area in which the lives and time logic of students are seen to dominate the meaning and usage of space. Within discussions of the potential of student populations to change place meanings and dominate space, it is particularly the segregated nature of student accommodation that was theorised to be a catalyst for conflicting requirements on the living environment by students and other residents. In this discussion, specific attention was paid to students' socialisation into halls of residence introducing them to homogenous living environments with the potential to create a residential taste characterised by the desire to live around people in similar life circumstances.

While universities used to see the provision of housing as an integral aspect to their overall mission, over time this aspect was outsourced to commercial actors and organisations who spotted a profit potential by renting out to students. Also with regards to the delivery of education, the encroachment of the private sector is omnipresent in universities and on campus. The notion of the neoliberal university refers to this processes in which universities are managed like a commercial business and in their funding system rely on financial structures that are risky for the state as the lender and the students as the debtors. As a result education has been conceptualised as a purchasable good, placing 'student consumers' in the middle of a market transaction just by attending HE. Furthermore, the commodification of university education and the associated involvement of the private sector in such

processes has long left the spatial surroundings of the campus, and is influencing many other aspects of student life, even those that are not attached to education or housing.

Students' sense-making of their time at university was described as a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood in which students make sense of a new type of freedom and the associated responsibilities. Ideas around what it means to be a student are forming before attending university and can be relatively comprehensive. Most importantly, they entail many aspects to the potential life of a student that are not in connection to education or the university. Specific ways of socialising and the social spaces in which these activities take place are of central importance for associating with fellow students and for acquiring a sense of being the right type of student. Overall, students have been observed to aspire to a normative experience that comprises disparate aspects of their lives in the city. Because of the all-encompassing nature of this normative experience anyone who is not able to live up to its components experiences a sense of exclusion and segregation from the community.

While research on studentification gives an account of how students interact with the urban surroundings, these observations are focused on residential areas only and studies on students' relationship to other urban areas is still comparatively scarce. Within this narrow field of research, several arguments concerning the engagement of students with the university city and their position within have been made. One strand of research situates students as key contributors to urban economies with the power to shape the urban environment according to their needs. A second strand of research studies how students create a sense of place in their university city and how this is contingent on changing spatial patterns over time. The third strand of research discussed here, noted that students have specific patterns in time and space and show a regulated movement through the city primarily frequenting student spaces. In turn, this nurtures the idea of service providers that students' needs can only be met in separation to the needs of other urban residents. Especially with regard to night-time economies, several scholars have argued that attributes of student nightlife act exclusionary on non-student populations. In doing so, the practices of

students and the spaces in which they are enacted are conceptualised to have the potential to monopolise space at the expense and exclusion of other urban groups.

## CHAPTER 4

### Exploring Student Realities

In this research, I am interested in meaning and how it is created around the urban environment. Particularly, I want to explore how university students work out what it means to be a student in urban space. The previous chapters have situated the study of students' practices in the urban environment of UK university cities within the concepts of urban entrepreneurialism and symbolic economies. The involvement of private sector actors in the provision of services and infrastructure for students can be conceptualised within Massey's discussion of the place-space relationship in which national and international developments impact local processes but are at the same time shaped by the locality in which they unfold. As it was shown in the previous chapter, university students have been studied from four interrelated perspectives. The first explores residential patterns of students and the impact of their housing decisions on neighbourhoods and local communities. The second discusses the notion of the neoliberal university connected to the commodification of student culture on and off campus. The third research strand studies students' sense-making of the transition to university and the development that occurs in this time period. The final perspective, but also by far smallest area of research, situates students in a broader urban context also outside of residential areas.

The research questions of this thesis developed out of this literature analysis and the identification of several research gaps. First of all, in much of the research about students and universities in cities, the 'student voice' is absent and little is known about how students acquire a sense of place in the university city and how this relates to their idea of what it means to be a student. For example, while the relationship between students and urban space is rather well-established with regard to their residential areas, it became apparent to me that much of the studentification research examines the topic either from the perspective of neighbourhood change and established residents or from a quantitative perspective using population statistics to measure demographic change. However, only a few studies have

explored some of the ways in which students make sense of their residential environments and why they choose certain types of accommodation and certain locations over others. This will be one of the central concerns of the research presented here and is connected to the broader objective of exploring students' relationship to the university city as whole, that means also outside of residential areas.

What it means to be a student has an inherently spatial quality but only a few scholars have studied the importance of place for student culture outside of residential areas (e.g. Paul Chatterton, Mark Holton). Student life does not just take place in residential neighbourhoods but many other areas of the city are important spaces for social and cultural practices and encounters. In reference to the findings of Chatterton (1999; Chatterton and Hollands, 2004) and Holton (2015a; Holton and Riley, 2014) who have noted the importance of leisure and entertainment spaces in city centres for student culture, I aim to explore other urban areas that are of significance to the lives of students but that are not primarily used as residential neighbourhoods.

While the city centre will be one area of interest another urban site that requires more attention with regard to its position in student lives is the university. Studying the importance of the university in students' lives can be understood in a two-fold way. On the one hand, the objective is to get a sense of how students relate to and use the physical space of the university campus and what type of social practices take place there. On the other hand, the aim is also to tease out how students' enrolment and participation in a degree programme influences their social and spatial practices on and off campus as well as their overall relationship to the university city.

In summary, in this research I am interested in exploring the broader engagement of students with the urban environment as experienced from their perspective. In the previous chapter, I argued that all sorts of characteristics and circumstances could mark students out as different from the group and act in an exclusionary way. The very category 'student' seems to contain a normative experience that students aspire to achieve. Building on this, ultimately, in this research I am interested in studying

the notion of the student experience and the kind of practices and engagements with place that are seen to be necessary to achieve it. Addressing these lacunae, my research explores the following questions:

1. How do students engage with the city centre environment of their place of study?
2. Why do students make certain residential choices and how do their residential patterns influence their engagement with the city?
3. How do students' develop a sense of place in the university city? What role does the university have therein?

These research questions should be understood as constituting a guideline and frame that shaped the pilot studies and fieldwork conducted as part of this research, rather than constituting a set of questions that will be answered in their completeness in the concluding chapter.

This chapter will illuminate the ways in which the themes of these questions will be studied and researched with a particular focus on the underlying research methodology and the methods that develop out of this. Initially, I will discuss how students' practices in cities and their sense-making of the urban environment can be studied from a methodological perspective. In doing so, I want to briefly move away from the specific research questions stated above to address wider questions of how knowledge concerning people's perceptions and practices in the urban environment can be generated (an epistemological issue) and the ontological question concerning the nature of student realities. In this part, I will discuss the implications of social constructionism and empirical phenomenology on qualitative research and its methods. This relates back to an argument made in the previous chapter in which scholars claimed that phenomenology is a suitable research methodology to investigate how people attach meaning to the environment and make sense of it (Gieryn, 2000; Seamon and Sowers, 2008).

Secondly, I will discuss the inferences of this methodology for the methods that were employed in the fieldwork process, specifically the use of autophotography, photo-

elicitation and walking interviews. Visual methods will be established as an important tool in order to achieve an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. In a similar vein, mobile methods are argued to reduce the gap between the researcher and the researched in an attempt to get a better understanding of how students relate to place and their practices within. All of this is connected through the interpretive role that I adopt as a researcher which beyond a description of participants' behaviour also involves understanding, explaining and analysing it. This has a crucial influence on the type of knowledge that is generated in the fieldwork process but also for the further interpretation of this information. Recognising this positionality is vital because both the methodology and analytic approach underlying this research identify the important role of the researcher in the creation of knowledge.

#### 4.1. Interpreting Students' Accounts and Social Action

In Chapter Two, I discussed several selected studies of urban cultures and argued that research on culture as a way of life is often focused on a single social group in a specific location or social setting. Therefore, in the choice of methodology it was important to pick an approach that is sensitive to people's individual practices but at the same time also offers insights into collective phenomena. With this in mind, the main pillars of this methodology are constituted by empirical phenomenology (Aspers, 2009) as conceived of by Alfred Schutz (1972), coupled with social constructionist thought, specifically the work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991). Commonly, these epistemological and ontological explorations are referred to as 'sociology of knowledge', with roots dating back to the Enlightenment period and evident in the ideas of philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and his distinction between the phenomenal world of objects and the noumenal world of consciousness (Craib, 1997). A crucial contribution to this literature is Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. In their analysis, they trace influences of Karl Marx's and Friedrich Nietzsche's work in the concept of 'Wissenssoziologie' as coined by Max Scheler but ultimately attribute the widespread use of the term to the work of sociologist Karl Mannheim and the

development of his ideas by Robert Merton (1991: 15, 23-24). Berger and Luckmann distance themselves from sociology of knowledge advocated by Scheler, Mannheim, and Merton instead arguing that the concept should focus exclusively on ideas about the social construction of reality. They summarise this focus by stating that “a ‘sociology of knowledge’ will have to deal not only with the empirical variety of ‘knowledge’ in human societies, but also with the processes by which *any* body of ‘knowledge’ comes to be socially established as ‘reality’” (1991: 15, italics in original). In order to explore Berger and Luckmann’s ideas around the constructed nature of reality in more depth, some fundamental ideas concerning the nature of social action and how people generate meaning around practices is key (Peterson, 2012).

The insights from sociology of knowledge develop over questions concerning the nature of reality and knowledge rather than positivist assumptions about how the ‘real world’ can be tested, measured and researched. The researcher’s positionality has to be accounted for throughout the whole research process and all of its outcomes. Picking up on this role description, Max Weber was one of the most important sociologists contributing to the formation of this interpretive approach within the social sciences (Weber, 1978). In the introduction to Weber’s *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Anthony Giddens explains that Weber wrote in a context which recognised the increasing importance of history on studying human action (1985: ix). This is presented as a major influence on Weber’s reflections which emphasise that an understanding of meaning that is generated by human action has to be achieved. Crucial to his methodology is the distinction between behaviour and social action, in which behaviour is an act not designed to communicate meaning from the perspective of the acting individual whereas social action, according to Weber, should be the main subject of sociological inquiry because it implies a meaningful deed (Craib, 1997). What is significant about the study of social action is the idea that only the individual can engage in meaningful social action and should thus be the main unit of social analysis (Parkin, 1982). This underlines Weber’s standpoint that there is no collective personality; the collective is made up out of individuals who think, act and feel. With this position, Weber also



significantly contributes to the foundation of phenomenological theory which takes the individual as a starting point.

The differentiation between meaningful action, which is oriented to do some type of social work, and behaviour, that means acts that are not intended to communicate meaning, will be of specific importance in reference to the frame analysis approach that was applied to the data. Weber's *verstehen* approach further offers insights into how meaningful social action conducted by individuals can be understood. While Weber introduces two types, observational and explanatory understanding, it is mainly the latter that is regarded as the only way of *verstehen* through its function to reveal motivations and meanings rather than a more superficial understanding of these based on observations only (Parkin, 1982; Craib, 1997). This type of empathetic understanding then enables the researcher to comprehend the structure within which the individual makes sense of an act and assigns meaning to it. With reference to empirical phenomenology and the importance of language in this philosophy but also in social constructionist thought, more will be said in the following paragraphs about how the approach of empathetic understanding can be operationalised and applied in the study of students' practices in the urban environment.

## 4.2. The Social Construction of Student Realities

In this research, I adopt an approach focusing on meaning and how it is created around the urban environment. Weber's differentiation between behaviour and action and his emphasis on understanding actors' meaning structures constitutes the basis of this research and has influenced several other philosophies which have contributed ideas to how meaning is created, communicated and transmitted. Social constructionism gives important insights into how individual meanings come to be part of collective ones (Kashima, 2014) because similarly to Weber, it is argued that meanings are not fixed or inevitable but the result of "historical events, social forces, and ideology" (Hacking, 1999: 2). One of the main assumptions of social constructionism is that there is no essential meaning, knowledge or truth but rather that claims are dependent on the standpoint of the actor (Burr, 2015). If knowledge

is not inherent in the world, then it is argued that multiple truths and ‘knowledges’ exist which are effectively constructed to fit an actor’s subjective experience (Andrews, 2012; Peterson, 2012).

This has consequences for reality as a whole which constructionists argue to be a social construction rather than an objective condition. The inspiration for this idea can again be traced back to Weber who believed that the ability to grasp the essence of reality is an illusion in that social reality is made, not discovered, and dependent on the perspective through which it is interpreted (Parkin, 1982: 28). In other words, meaning is not an independently existing quality in the world but it comes through interpretation. However, the constructed nature of reality is argued to not be apparent to individuals who take it for granted and see it as being inevitable. The introduction to Bruno Latour’s *Pandora’s Hope* gives a good example for this idea of conflicting realities which are not ‘objectively verifiable’:

‘I have a question for you,’ he said, taking out of his pocket a crumpled piece of paper on which he had scribbled a few key words. He took a breath: ‘Do you believe in reality?’  
‘But of course!’ I laughed. ‘What a question! Is reality something we have to believe in?’  
(1999: 1)

Probably constructionists would reply to the final question of this quote with an assertive ‘Yes!’ and many examples of common social constructions in Western society could be mentioned by way of illustration. Ian Hacking (1999) refers to gender as one of the most influential social constructs of human times. However, he is careful to point out that even though social constructions do not exist naturally in the world, they still feel real for the people who are experiencing them and can have serious implications.

The aforementioned work of Berger and Luckmann is an influential piece for this research and despite the gendered language it is worth quoting them here in summary of the key points mentioned above: “While it is possible to say that man [sic] has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man produces himself” (1991: 67). They introduce the concept of “institutionalization” (1991: 65) in reference to the predisposition of humans to share

meanings of habituated activities and create patterns which are then taken for granted. Berger and Luckman explain that the practices that people engage in repeatedly become habits. The meanings of these habituated practices become embedded in routines and as part of that are taken for granted and are not renegotiated every time the practice is enacted. They refer to these meanings of habituated activities which facilitate the creation of categorical knowledge, form part of routines and are perceived to be objective truths, as “typifications” (1991: 72). Typifications then are the framework through which anything that is not yet known or experienced will be interpreted. Berger and Luckmann explain that “[i]nstitutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors” (1991, 72). That means for typifications to become institutions they need to be shared by various actors within certain structures. As such, the concept of institutionalisation could also be understood as a scale indicating the degree to which meanings of habituated practices are shared between various actors. Leading on from this, typifications with a large degree of institutionalisation, that means those which are shared by a large proportion of people, can be regarded as social constructions.

For this research the concept of a typification refers to the shared meanings people attach to habituated activities, which result in the production of legible, categorical knowledge. This is of importance, since the analysis chapters will show that amongst the participants several typifications were detected. The concept of institutionalisation is also vital in the sense that it refers to the degree to which these typifications are shared throughout and across social groups. In referring to typifications in this research then, I am referring to meanings of habituated practices that are shared by several people in this research.

Socialisation is the process through which meanings are negotiated and agreed and subsequently also passed on to further generations (Andrews, 2012). In Berger and Luckmann’s terminology, essentially what is being passed on from the parents to the child are typifications which are perceived as objective truths. These typifications exist and are not *per se* untrue but they claim to contain knowledge about reality that is seen to be objective and inevitable when it is not. Practices of meaning-making are

thus also highly educational developments although it has also been argued that in the process of transmission a simplification is likely to occur resulting in what Berger and Luckmann call a “common formula” (1991: 87). Overall, this type of socialisation is referred to as primary socialisation in the sense that it looks at how the child is introduced into the social world by its parents or guardians (1991: 149-158) and stands in contrast to secondary socialisation passed on through people not closest of kin. The notion of meaning-transmission through socialisation will be important for this research since various participants have pointed towards the significance of knowledge acquired about student life prior to attending university, passed on from friends, family members and media outlets.

Underlying all of these concepts is the role of language as a powerful tool in creating, facilitating and spreading social constructions. Berger and Luckmann emphasise this point, stating that “language is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to the following generations” (1991: 52). Language thus does not just allow humans to give structure to perceptions and thoughts, which is a crucial component of meaning-making processes (Burr, 2015), but it also gives people the ability to interact with others and by doing so share, affirm and consolidate knowledge (Houston, 2001; Andrews, 2012). To use Berger and Luckmann’s terminology, social interactions enable humans to negotiate typifications in relation to others’ actions and perceptions and how these are being communicated. It enables people to create mutuality and common ground in terms of understanding the meaning someone has created around an action (Kashima, 2014). It is thus a precondition to socialisation and the creation of social constructions and facilitates what Berger and Luckmann refer to as “reality maintenance”, a process in which people reaffirm that their idea of reality is what is going on (1991: 167-174).

Several criticisms of social constructionist theory could be discussed here for instance, its propensity to be defined in terms of moral relativism rendering every opinion to be as adequate as another (Hacking, 1999). Furthermore, it has been argued that the implications of constructionist theory for personal agency and the possibility to stimulate change are not clear (Demeritt, 2002; Burr, 2015). If nothing

is inevitable and any description of reality is in fact only standpoint specific, then how can social, economic and cultural inequalities be analysed? Ultimately this relates to issues of power and questions such as who or what has the ability to create and facilitate social constructions but also to stimulate change (Andrews, 2012)? While Berger and Luckmann might approach these questions by discussing “symbolic universes” (1991: from 113), referring to a totality of practices and meanings, and how these can become to be seen as problematic and be overturned, generally this research will not go into deeper discussions of these issues.

However, some major concepts from constructionist theory such as the vital function of language and interactions which supports the use of interviews in uncovering participants’ meaning structure is significant for this research. Furthermore, as argued before, the concept of typifications and their consolidation through socialisation processes but also the broader concept of the social construction will form an integral part of the analysis. Following Berger and Luckmann, a constructionist starting point is that realities are constructed and in order to study how this happens the researcher needs to explore people’s account of the world (Gergen and Gergen, 2003). The notion of the social construction then helps to collectivise this congregation of individual accounts. Here, a social construction is understood as a typification with a large degree of institutionalisation. A typification refers to meanings of habituated practices which constitute an oversimplification of what is going on. A social construction contains these meanings but also implies that a large number of people adhere to this typification. As will be discussed later, most of the participants in this research relate to their time as students and all of the differentiated activities this entails as a student experience. Here, I want to explore how students construct the notion of the student experience and especially the function of the city within this, by exploring how individuals make sense of being a student socially and spatially and how they relate their account to this social construction.

### 4.3. Empirical Phenomenology and the Study of Students' Lifeworlds

While there is disagreement between different constructionists about the existence of an objective reality, there would be agreement on the assumption that even if it does exist, it is impossible to study *sui generis*. Following this approach, that which can be known about the social world is based on studying people's practices and perceptions of it. As the study of the phenomenon, so how the world appears to us, phenomenology is thus very closely linked to social constructionism. Also Berger and Luckmann see the interdependence of social constructionism and phenomenology and point out that the method they consider to be "best suited to clarify the foundations of knowledge in everyday life is that of phenomenological analysis" (1991: 34). In its essence phenomenology does not question whether a phenomenon actually exists; what matters is that it exists for the person who is being studied. Perhaps it could be argued that social constructionism can be regarded as a meta-theory exploring agglomerates of experiences and appearances, whereas phenomenology's focus lies on the individual whom it takes as the main unit of social analysis.

Similarly to social constructionism, phenomenological thought is based on theories from Nietzsche and Kant, arguing that people do not have access to the thing itself but only the appearance of it and was ultimately developed by Edmund Husserl (Lewis and Staehler, 2010). Knowledge that is taken for granted and seen to be inevitable is what Husserl refers to as the 'natural attitude' (Aspers, 2009; Lewis and Staehler, 2010). Since the existence of an objective truth is questioned in phenomenological thought, its focus on appearances is referred to as the 'phenomenological reduction' which offers a range of options of what the social world is constituted of (Bennett, 2013). The main subject of a phenomenological study is, according to Husserl, the 'lifeworlds' of individuals (Mohanty, 1997), a concept that refers to the lived experiences of people prior to any reflective analysis of them (Lewis and Staehler, 2010). Several scholars have recognised the importance of phenomenological thought for sociology of knowledge and have developed Husserl's theories further. This research draws on the theories of Alfred Schutz and

interpretations of his work as the foundation of empirical phenomenology, concerned with the study of everyday life and the habitual and taken-for-granted character of it. In contrast to Husserl's focus on notions such as essence and transcendental subjectivity (Mohanty, 1997), as a point of departure empirical phenomenology focuses on meaning and how people create it. The idea that an empathic understanding is necessary to explore the "meaning structure" (Aspers, 2009: 1) of social actors relates empirical phenomenology back to Weberian thought. The communication of meaning with regard to these lived experiences then becomes the foundation of an empirical analysis of these phenomena (Sixsmith and Sixsmith, 1987).

Patrik Aspers (2009) argues that Schutz is the main philosopher who made Husserl's phenomenology accessible for the social sciences. Berger and Luckmann also mention Schutz as an important influence on their philosophical work (1991: 9). Schutz' publication *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1972) develops some of the key insights of empirical phenomenology, in which he engages with Weber's interpretive sociology and ideas around meaningful social action which are important foundations to his work. Schutz follows Weber in stating that an interpretive approach should look at the intended meaning of social action from the perspective of the individual and that this can illuminate something about broader meaning structures. However, at the same he argues that Weber's concept of meaning needs further development (1972: 6). He summarises that Weber only differentiated between two types of meaning: "the subjectively intended meaning of an action and its objectively knowable meaning" (1972: 8). Schutz argues that meaning structures are much more complex than in Weber's description and that they can include a large number of layers forming complex relationships and hierarchies (1972: 10). Based on this idea, he argues that the problem of sociology is that various schools of thought choose one layer of meaning, develop a method to study it and then claim it to be the main starting point for any sociological inquiry. Perhaps Schutz is also guilty of this but in arguing that all of these approaches fail to start at the most basic layer, Schutz establishes phenomenology as an 'Urwissenschaft' or primordial science (Aspers, 2009). He claims that the most basic level of perception available to self-

reflection constitutes the most fundamental layer. Schutz explains: “Here and here only, in the deepest stratum of experience that is accessible to reflection, is to be found the ultimate source of the phenomena of ‘meaning’ (*Sinn*) and ‘understanding’ (*Verstehen*)” (Schutz, 1972: 12, italics in original).

## Towards Phenomenological Methods

With Schutz’s idea in mind, namely that people create complex layers of meanings around lived experiences, Aspers explains that it is then the task of the researcher to understand these structures and he argues that “[t]his process of meaning constitution, at the level of the individual, and meaning construction, at the social level, can be studied empirically by the researcher” (2009: 3). He differentiates between first-order constructs referring to the meaning structure of an individual and second-order constructs, as inspired by Weber (for example, as articulated by Parkin, 1982), referring for instance, to the researcher’s interpretation of an individual’s first order constructs and the development of those into a comprehensive theory. In short then, empirical phenomenology proclaims that it is the aim of research to establish second-order constructs through understanding actors’ first-order constructs.

Aspers (2009) argues that empirical phenomenology according to Schutz is an approach that has hardly been applied to sociological research, a fact that might explain why only few publications explicitly referring to this methodology could be found (e.g. Marbach, 1984; Sixsmith and Sixsmith, 1987; Marshall, 1996; Berry et al., 2010). However, in practice this study carries many of the attributes of a phenomenological inquiry. The starting point for this research is formed by people’s individual accounts of their lived experiences and how they create meaning around certain aspects of their social life. Qualitative research methods have been pointed out to be particularly suitable for these inquiries (Burr, 2015). Similarly to social constructionism, also in phenomenological thought language is regarded as an important tool in the communication of meanings and the creation and transmission of experiences and perceptions. Because of that interviews have been established as a fundamental tool for phenomenological research (Sixsmith and Sixsmith, 1987;



Aspers, 2009; Berry et al., 2010; Burr, 2015). Aspers (2009) argues that this is because interviews are the best way for the researcher to relate to the participant especially when the interviews are semi- or unstructured and involve open-ended questions (Berry et al. 2010), giving participants more opportunity to direct the course of the interview. Ultimately, this relates to reflections on questions of power in the research process because it is important for phenomenological research to acknowledge the involvement of the researcher in the data collection and her influence on the participants (Bennett, 2013; Burr, 2015).

The main goal of phenomenologically-informed research methods is to get as close as possible to the lifeworlds of the people who are being studied in order to understand how they create and assign meaning. This does not just make empirical phenomenology a philosophical foundation of ethnographic research but it calls for research methods that reduce the gap between the worlds of the researcher and the participant. Based on this understanding of phenomenology, several scholars have argued that interviewing alone is not enough to achieve these objectives. They have advocated the use of other methods in addition to interviews, such as participant observation, diary-writing and photography and have specifically recommended the use of visual methods in engaging with the lifeworlds of the participants (Aspers, 2009; Bennett, 2013).

Next, I shall discuss the use of interviews in conjunction with visual and mobile methods. To be more specific, I have used visual methods by asking my participants to take part in an autophotography project combined with photo-elicitation interviews, hoping to achieve meaningful and detailed descriptions of their practices as students and perceptions of the urban environment. Walking interviews as an additional method of this research were introduced due to a similar rationale. As a method, walking interviews merge participant observation and interviewing and the ultimate aim is to get a closer sense of the lifeworld of the person that is being studied.

## 4.4. Using Visual Methods

One of the major starting points for the use of visual methods is the idea that visual material can add something to the research that could not have been achieved by speech or writing only, especially with regard to revealing everyday and taken-for-granted knowledge and perceptions (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004; Rose, 2007, 2014). As Gillian Rose (2014) points out, photography is by far the most common technique employed in visual social research, and accordingly has received more recognition in discussions of sociological research methods (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004; Hogan, 2012; Rose, 2007, 2014). This acknowledgement and the increased usage of the technique for research purposes has been attributed to ‘ocularcentrism’ which (for able people) refers to the supremacy of the visual sense over other senses in perceiving and attributing meaning to the environment and social life within (Ferrarotti, 1993; Knowles and Sweetman, 2004; Urry, 2005; Rose, 2007).

However, photography as a research method cannot be taken for granted considering a historical divide in which photography was either seen as an art form or a scientific method that records supposedly exact representations of a specific scene (Schwartz, 1989). The recognition of photography as a sociological research method that can reveal something about the social world has been influenced by two photographers in particular. August Sander, a photographer who studied social class by photographing different people at work in Germany of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Eugene Atget, who captured Parisian street life and architecture in a similar time period, are reflective of this divide (Ferrarotti, 1993). Amongst the first photographers who merged understandings of the technique as an art form and a scientific method, both Sander and Atget aimed to reveal something about urban and social life through the use of photography (Ferrarotti, 1993).<sup>22</sup> Howard Becker (1974:

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<sup>22</sup> In doing so they were very influential in shaping documentary photography, a genre which still sees photographers exploring social practices and conflicts all over the world through the combination of journalistic methods, sociological topics, and artistic and aesthetic values. Several examples of photography projects which display this connection between art and the study of society could be mentioned here, for example, Jonas Bendiksen’s work ‘The Places We Live’ which captures the lives and conditions of people living in some of the world’s biggest informal settlements, or Ari Versluis’

3) argues that since its inception photography has always been used to study and explore society in this way, based on an affordance that refers to the “camera as a machine that records and communicates much as a typewriter does”. Because of that photography has long been situated somewhere in between purely being an art form or constituting an exact and objective scientific method.

With regard to the interpretive and subjective nature of the image, the positivistic turn in the social sciences condemned the inability of photography to create the desired objective knowledge and facts (Prosser, 1998; Becker, 2004). However, in the social sciences it is exactly the “tangibly objective” but also “irreducibly subjective” (Grady, 2004: 18) nature of photography that has increased its popularity as a research method and motivated its use in the research of this thesis. The idea that photography creates objective knowledge about reality and reveals truths is controversial. This can be due to the power of the photographer in shaping the final image, post-production techniques, or the fact the pictured scenes are taken out of context and can thus be used for all sorts of interpretations and arguments (Becker, 1974, 1998; Ferrarotti, 1993; Harper, 1998; Winston, 1998). Treating photos as if they are objective evidence disregards the importance of meaning that is created around images and the idea that the act of seeing is not just done through the eyes but also through the brain; it is not a neutral activity but involves (socialised) judgement and emotions (Harper, 1986; Schwartz, 1989; Ferrarotti, 1993). Images are part of the construction of reality and although an image might, from one perspective, be an exact representation of a certain situation its meaning is socially constructed (Harper, 1998; Knowles and Sweetman, 2004). As Rose (2007: 2) has argued: “what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed” and because of that, the use of photographs for research purposes needs to be based on certain epistemological and methodological assumptions (Prosser and Schwartz, 1998). Social constructionism and phenomenology, as the underlying research methodologies of this thesis, thus hint towards the importance of questions of meaning and subjectivity with regard to the image. This is based on the understanding that “it is not so much the status of the

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and Ellie Uyttenbroek’s project ‘Exactitudes’ which raises interesting questions about individuality and cultures.

image that is of concern, but its *conceptual and analytical possibilities*" (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004: 6; italics in original).

### Autophotography and Photo-Elicitation in Practice

Photography can be embedded in the research process in many ways. Whether it is the researcher who is taking the pictures, a typical feature of early anthropological research and also done by Schwartz (1989) in his study rural farming communities; or they can be taken by the participants, through the methods of autophotography and photovoice that will be discussed shortly; or the images can be taken from an external source, as per Jones' analysis of regeneration photography (2013). For this study, the main question is how could photography support phenomenological research and contribute to the aim of getting as close as possible to the lifeworlds of the people studied? The uncovering of meaning and meaning structures is one of the central elements in phenomenological thought and in choosing the method of autophotography, I asked the participants to take the photos, based on the idea that it is not so much about what images really are but more important is what the creator of the image intended it to do (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004; Rose, 2007). As such then I am not specifically interested in what exactly is pictured in the photograph but the main focus is on why the image is meaningful to the participant who took it.

The method of autophotography has been found to be especially useful to uncover how people see themselves in a certain social setting or in relation to others and thus investigates people's "personal frame of reference" with regard to the self (Ziller and Lewis, 1981: 338). By that it is meant that autophotography has been used to explore how people construct their idea of themselves and to get a sense of the components that form part of that (Noland, 2006). Often in autophotography, the participants are asked to take images in answer to a specific question or task (such as 'who are you?') with the idea that the images reveal something about people's self-concept and how they make sense of the world (Dollinger, 1996; Dollinger and Dollinger, 1997). As Noland explains:

Autophotography allows participants the freedom to use their actual surroundings, to pick and choose the people who are important to their self-concepts, and to decide what issues and what objects are the most salient to their construction of self. (2006: 3)

Although Becker (1974) has argued that photographers seldom concern themselves with quantitative methods, autophotography has been used for quantitative research in which the images and symbols within were coded and correlated to measurement scales (Dollinger and Clancy, 1993; Dollinger, 1996). However, this approach to autophotography undermines the importance of meaning since it only offers limited opportunities for the creators of the image to situate the picture's meaning within their personal context. In a qualitative research setting, autophotography has been used to study how people relate to their environment for instance, done by Dodman (2003) and his study of school children's perception of the urban environment in Kingston (Jamaica). In using autophotography as a qualitative method, it has been argued that the most useful way to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings of the images is by returning them to the participants and engaging them in a discussion of them. Using photos in interviews to prompt answers is referred to as photo-elicitation, a technique that has been extensively discussed by various scholars who study visual methods (for instance, Rose, 2007; Harper, 1986, 1998).

Based on the idea that the explanation of context is the most important aspect to retrieve meaning from photographs (Becker, 1998), Rose (2014) has argued that photo-elicitation pays most attention to what is said about the photo rather than the image itself. This argument is based on the idea that "images and words only become significant in relation to each other", emphasising the interdependence that exists between the photo and text or word respectively (Rose, 2007: 255). While from a broader perspective of photographic practice the idea that images cannot speak for themselves and merely have a decorative function supplementing text is controversial (Becker, 1974; Harper, 1986; Ferrarotti, 1993; Grady, 2004), photo-elicitation builds on the assumption that "[a] photograph is 'taken', but at the same time, 'made'" and can reveal something about how people construct their realities

(Chaplin, 2004: 36). Photo-elicitation does not necessarily include a pre-stage of autophotography since all sorts of images can be used, also those that might have not been taken by the participant or the researcher. Doug Harper (2002) and Gillian Rose (2007) have published detailed discussions of the development of photo-elicitation as a method and how it can be employed to social and cultural research. Most importantly it was argued that “[i]n-depth interviewing in all its forms faces the challenge of establishing communication between two people who rarely share taken-for-granted cultural backgrounds” and that photo-elicitation is able to overcome these difficulties at least partly (Harper, 2002: 20). While the advocacy of photo-elicitation is not intended to add to the idea that images are not able to be meaningful in themselves, with regard to the combination of the methods of autophotography and photo-elicitation it is important to reiterate that ultimately in this research it is not about the image itself but what the participants say about it. This also means that the interview transcripts are the main source of data that will be analysed in subsequent chapters.

Research specifically quoting autophotography as a method still seems surprisingly scarce, possibly because another method called photovoice on the surface seems to bare a lot of similarities with autophotography but is in many ways very different from it. Some scholars have argued that photovoice and autophotography are the same method (Phoenix, 2010; Kohon and Carder, 2014) and others have postulated that photovoice should be seen as a sub-genre of autophotography (Warren and Parker, 2009; Loopmaans et al., 2012). During the course of this PhD, also I have often referred to my method as photovoice due to the almost self-explanatory nature of this term and a lack of clarity about the differences between these two methods. The technique of photovoice was ‘developed’<sup>23</sup> by Caroline Wang in the 1990s and is mainly applied in studies researching public health and social issues with the intention of giving marginalised communities a voice through photography (Catalani and Minkler, 2010). As such, photovoice is referred to as a “participatory action

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<sup>23</sup> In none of Wang’s work on photovoice has autophotography been mentioned as an inspiration despite the fact that autophotography pre-dates photovoice by decades, considering that the earliest reference to this method that I could find are Ziller and Lewis in 1981.

research method” and it is stated to have three main objectives: first of all, turning people in certain communities into recorders of what is going on; secondly, facilitating dialogue about concerns the community has through group discussions; thirdly, influencing policy and policy-makers through the results of the research (Wang and Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 2000). Considering these objectives, photovoice is then a very specific method intended to draw attention to issues communities have with the environment they live in and it has the specific aim to bring about changes in these living circumstances through policy action.

As a method, photovoice has been commercialised and trademarked and is now also the name of a charity organisation offering different types of training courses as well as consultancy services. In contrast to that, the purpose of autophotography is to explore participants individually and especially how they see themselves and the world around them with the photos constituting a reply to a specific research question or task. Whereas with photovoice the images form part of a lobbying strategy and are visualising issues and conflicts, autophotography coupled with photo-elicitation focuses on meaning and mainly uses the images to get a closer sense of the lifeworld of the actor. On that basis, the method that was used for this research rather resembles autophotography than photovoice.

#### 4.5. Using Mobile Methods

So far this chapter has established the methodological foundation to this research which constitutes an interpretive approach focusing on meaning and how it is created within the urban environment. Social constructionism has been introduced as a philosophy that demonstrates how individual meanings become part of collective ones, arguing that in order to explore how reality is constructed for certain groups, people’s individual account of the world needs to be studied. Phenomenology, broadly defined as the study of how the social world appears to people, has then been established as the underlying research methodology with regard to its emphasis on understanding individual meaning structures of actors. Visual methods and specifically the use of autophotography and photo-elicitation have been situated

within this philosophy and the assumption that they enable a deeper understanding of the lifeworlds of the participants. The following sections will pick up on this endeavour to reduce the gap between the researcher and the researched in the discussion of mobile methods and specifically the so called go-along that was used in this research.

In the second chapter of this thesis I have discussed the place-space relationship and as part of that have argued that a sense of place is essential to human existence based on the idea that “there is *no place without self and no self without place*” (Casey, 2001: 684, italics in original). The notion of a sense of place was defined here as the attributing of meaning to the physical and social environment (Gieryn, 2000). The recognition of the importance of place in people’s perception of the world has been pointed out by various scholars who are building on the assumption that “our experience of the environment is fundamentally based on the coordinates of our living body, giving ‘place’ primacy over ‘space’” (Kusenbach, 2003: 455; Anderson, 2004; Pink, 2008a, 2008b). For several reasons policymakers, planners, activists and many other people are increasingly more interested in how people and communities perceive certain places and how they move through them, establishing aspects of place and mobility as an important part of research methodologies (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Hein et al., 2008). To be more specific, the phenomenological assumption is that the place of a conversation or interview influences the contents of such, thus implying that there is relationship between what is said and where it is said (Elwood and Martin, 2000; Anderson and Jones, 2009; Holton and Riley, 2014).

People move through environments in diverse ways and with various means but in this thesis I focus on walking since mobile methods were employed especially to study participants’ use and perception of the city centre and walking was the main means of movement through his environment. The act of walking can have a strong influence on how environments are perceived and is part of place-making practices (Pink, 2007). This is an observation that was already developed by Walter Benjamin (1999) and the figure of the *flâneur*, who walked the streets and arcades of Paris to observe and sense his environment and uncover different layers of meaning. Jenks and Neves (2000) explain that the *flâneur* and his activities are often seen in the



context of literary work rather than as a methodological foundation to research but argue that the activity of walking and the urban environment are essential to the flâneur's existence. They discuss whether the flâneur can be regarded as an urban ethnographer and come to the conclusion that although he is involved with the city and observes different parts of the population, the fact that he does not engage with any of them and does not focus on a specific group of people limits the depth of his analysis and observations (Jenks and Neves, 2000). However, although it might not be possible to take the flâneur as a role model of urban research, Benjamin's figure does make a statement about the importance of walking in the urban environment in order to establish a sense of place and gain knowledge about it, an idea that constitutes a starting point for the discussion of walking interviews below.

### Walking Interviews and the Go-Along in Practice

Walking interviews are research conversations that are conducted while the involved people are walking through a specific environment and they are used to explore participant's perception of space and their spatial practices *in situ*. Walking interviews allow access to individual biographies because of the connection of space and memory and enable the researcher to observe interaction patterns and social encounters (Kusenbach, 2003). While many of the types of probes that can be used in walking interviews are generic to interviews, the main idea is that the built environment acts as a natural facilitator of the conversation (De Leon and Cohen, 2005; Jones et al., 2008). Because of that, in some ways, walking interviews are yet another kind of visual method in the sense that a visual stimulus is used to elicit a conversation. Especially with regard to research that explores people's relationship to place and their surroundings, walking interviews have been argued to generate data that is more specific because they offer the opportunity to access attitudes and perceptions where they occur (Evans and Jones, 2011).

Walking interviews can be conducted in several ways for instance, the method could imply shadowing where the researcher follows and observes the participant and a conversation is only held prior to or after the walk (Evans and Jones, 2011). Another

option is the so called bumble or derive in which the participant and the researcher walk around aimlessly (Jenks and Neves, 2000; Anderson, 2004; Smith, 2010). A third option is to take all of the participants individually on a route that was predetermined by the researcher, a method that is especially useful when the area of interest is clearly defined. The type of walking interview that was used for this research is also referred to as the go-along which is a method in which the researcher walks with the participant who chooses the route and leads the way. It is the task of the researcher to ask questions and engage in a conversation along the way. As such the go-along can be considered as a combination of interviewing and participant observation that is particularly useful for research which explores people's relationship to place in environments that are familiar to them (Kusenbach, 2003; Jones et al., 2008; Carpiano, 2009). The go-along then offers an opportunity to understand people's interpretation of the environment while simultaneously experiencing it and "[i]n this regard, the researcher is 'walked through' people's lived experiences of the neighborhood" (Carpiano: 2009: 264).

Several studies could be mentioned here which have used the go-along as a technique to get a better idea of how people relate to their environment. For instance, Clark and Emmel (2010) speak about the go-along as an emerging method in the social sciences, Anderson and Jones (2009) have used the go-along to study the spatial practices of teenagers in schools, and Holton and Riley (2014) explored how undergraduate students establish a sense of place in the university town. The go-along is particularly useful in the study of the relationship between people and place and contributes towards the phenomenological objective to be closer to the lived experiences of the people studied. However, it should also be pointed out that it is never a truly natural walk and does some degree disturb the routines of the participants (Kusenbach, 2003; Clark and Emmel, 2010).

#### 4.6. Applied Methods in the Study of Students

Generally, the use of walking interviews or photography-based methods is rare in connection to studies of university students. Interviewing is by far the most common

method employed to these types of research and dozens of papers could be cited in this context (e.g. Wilcox et al., 2005; Christie et al., 2008; Taulke-Johnson, 2010). Some scholars made use of quantitative methods and statistics in exploring students' attitude towards particular aspects to their lives or in studying demographic change brought about by large student populations in cities (e.g. Amole, 2009; Mangan et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2014). Other methods employed in the study of students include the use of interviews in combination with focus groups (e.g. Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Holdsworth, 2006; Andersson et al., 2012) or participant observation (e.g. Chow and Healey, 2008; Clayton et al., 2009). Another group of scholars have extended their research focus and have also included other groups of people connected to student lives into the research process, such as policy makers, local residents, local entrepreneurs or casual university staff such as cleaners or builders (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Rogaly and Taylor, 2015; Long, 2016).

Only one study could be located which also used photography in connection to researching students; Fincher and Shaw (2011) have included photographs taken by the participants in their exploration of the relationship of local and international students to private and public urban space in Melbourne. Similarly, only one study was found that made use of walking interviews and the go-along particularly with regard to research about university students. In several academic publications, Mark Holton (e.g. 2014a/b, 2015a/b) analyses how undergraduate students in Portsmouth relate to the urban environment based on 31 walking interviews that he conducted as part of his PhD research.

In summary, while the use of interviews is very common in qualitative research about university students, the methods of photography and walking are little explored with regard to the study of this group. However, this is not entirely surprising considering that I argued in the previous chapter that studies connecting students to the urban environment are by far the smallest field of research. As such, the main focus of this chapter was to find methods that have been established as particularly useful in exploring how people relate to their environment and to apply these to the study of students in cities. The methods that have been proposed above (autophotography, photo-elicitation, and walking interviews) have thus not been advocated because

they are frequently used to study university students and their sense-making. Considering the small amount of studies of students that have used them, it is not possible to make a judgement about this. They have been chosen mainly because they have been established as suitable methods to explore the relationship and engagement of people with their environment. As the next chapter will reveal, my impression from the fieldwork is that they were very helpful in giving me a detailed understanding of what it means to be a student and how this relates to urban space.

## 4.7. Conclusion

This research aims to explore how undergraduate students relate to their university city, how they create a sense of place in this (often new) environment and the role of the university in facilitating a certain engagement with urban space. In finding a methodology it was important for me that it is sensitive towards individual practices and sense-making while at the same time offering possibilities to make broader claims about collective processes. Based on this, the insights of social constructionism and phenomenology were introduced, both of which build on Max Weber's interpretative approach to the analysis of how the social world is experienced and appears to individuals.

Social constructionism is a philosophy that explores how knowledge becomes constructed as social reality. Its proponents argue that there is no ultimate meaning or truth but that an understanding of the world is based on the actors' specific standpoint. However, these relative positions in the world and the meanings they entail are taken for granted by the actors. The work of Berger and Luckmann (1991) was cited specifically in reference to the concepts of institutionalisation and typifications and the role of socialisation and language in sharing and spreading meanings. Activities are habituated through frequent enactment and form part of routines but whenever an activity is performed again its meaning is not renegotiated. The concept of a typification refers to the meanings that are attached to these habituated activities which constitute categorical knowledge and an oversimplification of what is going on. The concept of institutionalisation refers to

the degree to which meanings of habituated activities (typifications) are shared amongst people and groups. A social construction is understood here as a typification that is shared by a large amount of people (that means it is a typification with a high degree of institutionalisation). This is an important distinction since the aim of the research is to get an understanding of how the participants understand the student experience, a notion that will be established as a social construction in the next chapter. Building on the assumption that people's understanding of reality is constructed, social constructionism then establishes that people's individual account of the world needs to be studied in order to get a closer understanding of the ways in which meanings become taken for granted knowledge of the nature of reality. The concepts of a typification and a social construction are important mechanisms to collectivise these accounts.

This constitutes the starting point for phenomenology, a philosophy that studies the accounts of individuals' lived experiences based on the idea that all that can be known about the social world is how it appears to people. In this thesis, I focus on empirical phenomenology introduced by Alfred Schutz which emphasises aspects of meaning and the application of empathetic understanding to get a sense of an actor's meaning structure. At the core of empirical phenomenology is the idea that people create complex layers of meaning around their practices and observations and it is the task of the researcher to get a sense of these structures. Language is a crucial component in this endeavour since it facilitates the communication of meanings, an argument that has been used to support the introduction of interviews in the research process. Building on this, phenomenologically-inspired methods are established as an attempt to get a close sense of the meaning structure of the actors by reducing the gap between the researcher and the researched. Interviewing alone might not be sufficient enough to achieve this objective which is why visual and mobile methods were introduced as tools to get a deeper understanding of how the participants make sense of the world.

The second part of this chapter focused on the discussion of the specific methods that were applied in the research process. Photography as a visual method offers the possibility to conduct research that achieves a richer understanding of the world of

the participants and the ways in which they construct their realities. The use of photography in the social sciences is especially suitable for research investigating the relationship of people towards their environment, based on the idea that the visual sense is one of the most dominant ones in perceiving these. Autophotography and photo-elicitation interviews are the specific methods that were employed in this research. The underlying assumption for the use of these methods is that the meaning of an image is socially constructed. Therefore, a conversation with the creator of an image is required in order to get an understanding about what it represents and how it could be interpreted.

Building on the idea that place is essential to human existence (Gieryn, 2000) and that the place of a conversation can influence what is being said, walking interviews were introduced as another method employed in this study with the potential to enable a closer understanding of the participants' lifeworlds. A particular interest of this research is to explore how the participants relate to the city centre and walking was identified as the main means of movement through this environment. Walking is part of place-making practices and it generates knowledge about the environment, an idea that was established by Walter Benjamin and his account of the flâneur. Walking interviews, specifically the go-along, are research conversations that are conducted while the researcher accompanies a participant on a walk. They thus constitute a combination of participant observation and interviewing giving the researcher an understanding of how space is lived and experienced *in situ*.

All of the methods that were introduced in this chapter (autophotography, photo-elicitation, walking interviews) are relatively novel with regard to their application in the study of students in cities. However, they have been established to be particularly useful in exploring how individuals and groups make sense of their environment. Since one of the primary objectives of this research is to gain understanding how being a student plays out in urban space, methods that are sensitive to the ways in which people assign meaning to their environment seem to be well suited and as the next chapter will reveal they gave a sense of how the student experience is constructed in space and time.

## CHAPTER 5

### Methods in Practice: Studying Students in Liverpool

This research investigates how students make sense of their university city and what it means to be a student in an urban environment. In Chapter Three, it was established that students have mainly been studied from four interrelated perspectives: firstly; exploring their housing and residential patterns; secondly, in discussions of the notion of the neoliberal university; thirdly, by focusing on their social development during this time; and fourthly, in studying their engagement with the university city outside of residential areas. Within this body of research, it is mainly various non-student actors either struggling with but sometimes also benefitting from the presence of larger student populations in cities who have been studied. The previous chapter has established social constructionism and empirical phenomenology as the methodological foundation of this research with their focus on how the individual generates meaning and how these structures come to be collective ones. In order to illuminate how students make sense of their urban environment also beyond residential areas and to explore how they engage with their place of study, the following research questions were established in the previous chapter:

1. How do students engage with the city centre environment of their place of study?
2. Why do students make certain residential choices and how do their residential patterns influence their engagement with the city?
3. How do students' develop a sense of place in the university city? What role does the university have therein?

The idea of integrating visual methods into the research is important to get a sense of how people relate to their environment because they allow close engagement with the meaning structure of the creator of the image. Due to my interest in the lifeworlds of the participants and their understanding of what is meaningful in the city, the

intersubjective nature of photography and discussions of these images were used as a tool to get a better idea of the places in the city that are important to them and how these connect to their lives as students. The attempt to find methods that allow a closer understanding of the participants' lives also justified the use of walking interviews which are a useful tool to investigate people's experiences and perceptions of an environment (Carpiano, 2009). By studying their spatial practices and awareness *in situ*, walking interviews offer the opportunity to explore people's everyday experiences and interactions and to merge interviewing with participant observation. The method I used in this research is often referred to as the 'go-along' (Kusenbach, 2003) in which the participant leads the way through an environment with me walking with them and facilitating the conversation.

The phenomenological assumption that all that can be known about the social world is how it appears to people builds the foundation for the exploratory nature of this research. It emphasises the need to have in depth conversations with my participants and to employ methods that allow an understanding of their meaning structure. As argued in the previous chapter, in order to achieve this level of depth on an individual basis, I chose a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews, visual methods and movement. In particular, I asked the participants to take part in an autophotography project that was then combined with photo-elicitation interviews. In order to achieve an even more thorough understanding of their lives in the city and their relationship to urban space I also invited all of my participants to take part in a walking interview. The first part of the chapter provides a detailed discussion of my experience of how these methods worked out in practices.

The second part of this chapter will discuss how the data generated through the methods can be analysed from a phenomenological perspective. A frame analysis approach inspired by the work of Erving Goffman will be introduced and discussed in more detail. Most essentially, this approach combines an exploration of how individuals create meaning while at same time offering a structure which allows the collectivisation of these individual standpoints and experiences. To be more specific, the frame analysis approach developed for the analysis of the transcripts revolves around the identification of the practices of the participants and how these are



rendered meaningful by them. Based on this meaning structure, the analysis approach develops broader patterns or identifies contradictions in the accounts of the participants. Together, these practices and layers of meaning are confined in the so called *frame*, a structure that simplifies the complex processes it contains. As I will establish in this chapter, this structure is interpreted to be a social construction. Ultimately, I analyse the notion of the student experience and its urban dimension in this particular context as the main social construction under consideration in this research.

## 5.1. The Case Study Sites and Pilot Studies

In order to become clearer about the effectiveness of previously conceptualised methods in exploring the research objectives, two pilot studies were conducted. To begin with, this research was conceived of as a case study of two cities: Liverpool (UK) and Berlin (Germany). More will be said about Liverpool as a case study site in the next section. With regard to Berlin, although the aim was never to create a comparison between the two case study sites the city was chosen for several reasons. Chapter Three has established that studentification research is also taking place in other countries all over the world. However, it is still the case that most of the research conducted about the phenomenon is based in the UK. Because of the Anglo-centric nature of studentification and related research, I wanted to explore whether those dynamics are also present in other countries and what kind of processes play out there. In order to do so, Berlin seemed like an appropriate choice considering that i) it hosts the largest student population in Germany; and ii) my origin from this city seemed promising in terms of my background knowledge of its spaces and culture.

### The Pilot Study in Berlin

I obtained ethical clearance for my research on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2014 and conducted the Berlin pilot study in the same month with four participants who were enrolled at a Berlin university. Gaining participants was rather difficult in Berlin due to the fact that

I was recruiting participants during the universities' summer break. All of the participants took part in the autophotography project but the use of walking interviews in the Berlin context was not practicable considering that it is a polycentric city and that the travel between these different central areas would have taken up too much time.

One of the participants also kept what I referred to as a 'city diary' besides also taking part in the autophotography project. The use of diaries, sometimes also in combination with photography and video, has been established within phenomenological assumptions of research; particularly, with regard to the aim of achieving a closer understanding of the experiences of those that are being studied and giving them more power in the research process (Latham, 2003; Holliday, 2004; Hogan, 2012). It was mainly Alan Latham's study of sociality (2004) within the context of busy urban streets and places that fascinated me. His study was conducted in the back drop of questions such as "How can we gain a sense of how individuals weave particular locals into their daily life paths?" (Latham, 2004: 120). Investigating people's everyday practices in the city, Latham (2004) asked his participant to take pictures of her everyday urban environments and to accompany these with a photo-diary with information on her location, the purpose of her visit, who she was surrounded by and her reflections on the environment. Arguing that the diary makes it possible for the researcher to go even deeper into the world of the participant, Latham facilitated this further by conducting interviews with her after the completion of the photo and diary task. For this research, I combined the methods of autophotography with the diary referring to it as a 'city diary'. However, as will be discussed below, from all of the trialled methods this was the least successful one and it was subsequently dropped. Because of that it was not discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

In terms of the evaluation of methods, the Berlin pilot gave an idea of the suitability and effectiveness of the autophotography and photo-elicitation method.<sup>24</sup> The next

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<sup>24</sup> The main task for the participants who used this method was to take photos of places in the city that are meaningful for their everyday life.

section provides a more elaborate discussion of the advantages of autophotography; suffice to say here that this method seemed like a compromise between the effort the participants put in to complete the photo task and the data and comfort that was brought to the interview situation through the photos. This cannot be said about the 'city diary'. The participant who completed this task still took pictures of places in the city important for her everyday life as part of the autophotography project. Simultaneously I asked her to keep a diary in which she noted down when she was in which location, for what reason, who was there with her and how she perceived the environment. I asked her to keep the diary over three days and though she willingly kept it for this period of time, it became apparent to me that the task implied an unreasonable amount of work for the participant. She stated that she had difficulties in frequently assessing her emotional state and reflecting upon the environment in which she was in without sounding too repetitive. In addition she had problems with recalling who was with her in a certain environment besides the people she knew. Furthermore, since the 'city diary' was used as an addition to the autophotography task and photo-elicitation interview, it became apparent that it hardly added any information. The discussion of the photos already elicited a conversation over the most meaningful everyday places and practices. Therefore, it seemed that the data acquired through the 'city diary' method did not justify the effort and work the participant put in and subsequently the method was dropped.

However, besides the unsuitability of one method the pilot study in Berlin revealed something a lot more important for this research. Although all of the participants were enrolled as full-time students, the pictures they took of important everyday spaces seemed to have little connection to their life as students.<sup>25</sup> Rather than as students they argued to see themselves primarily as citizens of Berlin and their student status did not change much about their relationship to the city or how it developed in the first place. In this context, it should also be mentioned that there are no tuition fees at any public university in Berlin which changes the financial situation and dependencies of students but perhaps also the readiness to complete

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<sup>25</sup> That is apart from a picture of the university that almost everyone included and the argument that their student status allows them to be more flexible with their time.

higher education. At the same time, it has the potential to reduce the pressure for students to complete their studies within the recommended number of semesters and makes it possible for those who think that they have made the wrong choice, to switch programmes or start all over again.

Another aspect that is essential in understanding the relationship of Berlin students to the city is the provision of accommodation. In contrast to the UK where a large proportion of student accommodation is provided through private and university halls, the concept of halls was foreign to the participants with all of them privately renting flats from housing associations and cooperatives, sometimes sharing them with other housemates by subletting rooms to further tenants. As such the system in Berlin surpasses a major benefiter of the English system, namely landlords and investors buying up or building houses to rent them out to students specifically. It also gives more freedom to students in terms of furnishing and designing their flats since most of the participants lived in previously unfurnished flats. This also has implications for the residential mix in a city like Berlin because whereas most of the literature on studentification describes the formation of student clusters in residential areas of UK cities (e.g. Smith, 2005), such concentrations of student populations in one specific area have not been observed in Berlin. Therefore, from a residential perspective students in Berlin tend to mix with other populations and the participants pointed out that this practice contributes to their understanding of themselves primarily as a resident of the city rather than a student.<sup>26</sup>

Overall, the pilot study in Berlin revealed that the design of this research project is inappropriate for this location and its context. Most importantly, it became apparent to me that the differences between Berlin and Liverpool as case study sites are difficult to deal with, even in the context of two non-comparative case studies. The initial topic of this research was largely constructed from the Anglo-centric perspective with regard to the existing literature and research. In order to do justice

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<sup>26</sup> This does not exclude that smaller German cities might also experience studentification processes. However, my pilot study of students in Berlin indicates that these processes do not seem to apply to the participants there. At the same time, it should be mentioned that there is a development towards an increase in purpose built and furnished student accommodation also in Berlin to cater for international students.

to both case study sites (i.e. to be place sensitive) it would have been necessary to approach the research topic from two substantially different angles which might also include different research question per case study site. Considering the scope of the PhD thesis, this would have had major implications on the possibility to establish depth in the actual research with the participants or would have been too extensive to fit into a postgraduate research project. Therefore, I made the decision to drop Berlin as a case study site and focus exclusively on Liverpool.

### Liverpool, UK: An Exemplary Entrepreneurial City

I chose Liverpool as the case study site of this research for several reasons. Chapter Two has established that place meanings are diverse and contested but also that city governments are increasingly interested in influencing and fixing these through practices of place marketing (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Massey, 2007). These types of practices are situated within the notion of the entrepreneurial city, a concept that describes a shift in which cities focus on the attraction of investment and the promotion of economic growth, giving private actors and companies more power to shape the urban environment and its politics (Molotch, 1976; Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998). As part of these strategies it is not just physical places that come to be advertised, aestheticised and commodified but also the promotion of certain cultures is an important component of that, creating landscapes of exclusion and cultural hierarchies (Harvey, 1992; Zukin, 1995; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Stevenson, 2003). Within the research about the entrepreneurial character of city governance as well as the role of culture in symbolic economies it has been emphasised that in order to gain a deeper understanding of how these processes play out, research needs to focus on the lived experiences of individuals and groups who use places and make sense of these environments (Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Stevenson, 2003; Massey, 2007; Hubbard, 2011).

Liverpool is a city situated in the North West of the UK that counted approximately 485,000 residents in 2016 (Liverpool City Council, 2017i). It has seen numerous attempts towards the regeneration of urban space and associated with it the

promotion of a certain image of urban life to the degree that Hall and Hubbard (1998: 5) mention Liverpool as an archetypal entrepreneurial city in the UK, an observation shared by several other scholars (e.g. Coleman and Sim, 2000; Couch and Dennemann, 2000; Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; Sykes et al., 2013). Also Harvey (1989: 7) mentions Liverpool in his discussion of how retail, culture and entertainment developments are utilised as part of entrepreneurial strategies for the purpose of image construction. Although Liverpool was at one point the second most important port in the UK engaging in international trade with minerals, raw materials, and most horribly slaves, it increasingly lost its importance in the global economy and as a consequence experienced decades of decline and decay causing a decrease in the population, large-scale unemployment and other social issues (Couch et al., 2005; Sykes et al., 2013).

Liverpool is often considered to have been a world city throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century with an expanding port area that even in 1970 was still considered to be one of the largest ports in the British Commonwealth (Wilks-Heeg, 2003; Sykes et al., 2013). However, since then the docklands in Liverpool rapidly degenerated due to technology advancement such as air travel and new transport machinery, harsh declines in the industries that shaped the city's hinterland, and a focus of central government on London as the geographical centre for knowledge and logistics associated with imports and exports (Adcock, 1984; Sykes et al., 2013). Since Liverpool's economy was centred on the port and hardly diversified over the years and decades, the city was hit especially hard by the decline of the docklands (Wilks-Heeg, 2003). It became known as a place with severe socio-economic problems and was characterised as a "disorderly city at odds with the cutting edge of neo-liberal discourse and the maker of its own demise" (Coleman and Sim, 2000: 624). As a consequence it became something like a Guinea pig for various urban policy tests, to the degree that Liverpool is characterised as the only city in the UK that has been subjected to all major urban policy experiments (Couch and Dennemann, 2000; Couch, 2003; Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004).

Going back to the times of deindustrialisation, Liverpool was not the only city experiencing economic decline and social issues and as a consequence of that inner

city policy became an area of intervention for central government under Margaret Thatcher (Adcock, 1984). Waterfront sites were a major target of regeneration efforts and also for the case of Liverpool this constitutes the starting point of its regeneration history (Jones, 2015). In October 1980, the Conservative Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, announced the establishment of two Urban Development Corporations whose purpose it was to regenerate derelict dockland areas. One of them was established in London, the other one was formed on Merseyside and contained large parts of Liverpool's waterfront (Adcock, 1984). The Merseyside Development Corporation (MDC) was founded in March 1981 and was established as an agency that is separate to the city council, a decision that was regarded as controversial by the Labour city government and parts of the local population (Adcock, 1984; Meegan, 1999). In effect, one of the main rationales behind the agency approach to the establishment of the MDC was that it would make the involvement of the private sector and associated investment easier (Adcock, 1984). While initially a lot of public sector money would flow into the redevelopment of the Liverpool's waterfront, it was envisioned and later also realised that the main task of the MDC would be to negotiate with the private sector and provide land and space so that they can carry out the refurbishment (Adcock, 1984; Meegan, 1999).

In line with Hall and Hubbard's discussion of urban entrepreneurialism as the "proactive promotion of local economic development by local government in alliance with other private sector agencies" (1998: 30), the establishment of the MDC can be interpreted as a first step towards public private partnerships in city governance in Liverpool. This is demonstrated by some of the supposed milestones of the existence of the MDC (from 1981 to 1998) which are for instance, an International Garden Festival that took place in 1984, the refurbishment of the Albert Dock and its official opening in 1988 and in its final years an emphasis on global place-marketing, specifically to attract investment from America and Asia (Meegan, 1999). While the MDC was regarded as a flagship programme for urban policy under the Thatcher administration, Liverpool City Council which was controlled by what is often referred to as a 'Militant Labour Government' (e.g. Meegan, 2003; Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; Sykes et al., 2013) regarded it as an infiltration of central government which is

why throughout its lifetime the MDC had a somewhat isolated status and perhaps limited impact on the city politics outside of its boundaries (Meegan, 1999). However, most of that changed in 1997 with the victory of New Labour and in 1998 in Liverpool, through the election of the Liberal Democrats as the strongest party in the City Council. As a consequence of these political changes, Liverpool City Council became much more cooperative towards central government and promoted public private partnerships, entrepreneurialism, and regeneration (Sykes et al., 2013: 311). Besides the MDC, several other examples could be provided here to illustrate Liverpool's shift towards entrepreneurial strategies in urban governance, for instance the establishment of Liverpool Vision as the UK's first Urban Regeneration Company in 1999. Two other processes and developments that are particularly noteworthy in this narrative are Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2008 and the construction of the retail complex Liverpool One.

After Glasgow had won the ECOC title in 1990 as the first post-industrial city, many other urban areas that have been suffering from industrial, economic and social decline felt compelled to bid for the title in subsequent years; one of them was Liverpool (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004). In 2003, Liverpool's bid under the slogan "The World in One City" was the surprise winner of the competition and the prospect of being a Capital of Culture in 2008 sparked all sorts of efforts to be able to present a presumably clean, safe, and contemporary city to visitors (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; Sykes et al., 2013). However, already before 2008 there were concerns that the promised job creation will mainly refer to unstable, low paid jobs and that the ECOC year will favour visitors over local people, thus having little effect on poorer communities further away from the city centre (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004). While some evaluations of the ECOC year argue that in 2008 Liverpool became a global city that is growing and turned its image around (Boland, 2010; Garcia et al. 2010; Sykes et al, 2013), other accounts have been more critical towards the impact of this year. In contrast, they would argue that notions of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism were strategically used in branding campaigns but do not reflect the social reality in the city at the time, which was still characterised by large socio-economic and racial inequalities (Boland, 2010). Furthermore, the benefits of the ECOC year were



concentrated in a very small area and rather than trickling down to deprived neighbourhoods, these areas of the city felt even more cut off from the city centre (Boland, 2010). It can therefore be argued that the ECOC year in Liverpool is another primary example for how place-marketing practices aiming to attract investment actually increase socio-economic inequalities and subsequently create more polarised cities (Harvey, 1989, 1992; Hall and Hubbard, 1998).

This argument becomes especially apparent when looking at another consequence of the ECoC year: the leisure and retail complex Liverpool One. Boland (2010) establishes cultural regeneration practices as social control mechanisms that bring about spaces where power and control can be exercised. Liverpool One is a space in the city centre of Liverpool that can be conceptualised within this argument. After it was announced in 2003 that Liverpool would be a Capital of Culture in 2008, the city government was eager to create 'world-class' retail and leisure opportunities in supposedly safe and clean spaces in the city centre (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; Daramola-Martin, 2009). The willingness of the Grosvenor Group to invest £1 billion into 42 acres of land in the city centre was positively received by Liverpool City Council who in turn guaranteed Grosvenor a 250 year lease on the land (Daramola-Martin, 2009). Liverpool One took four years to complete and was eventually opened in 2008 just in time for Liverpool's year as ECoC. Known then as Europe's largest regeneration project (Daramola-Martin, 2009), it also came under substantial scrutiny. Most importantly, Liverpool One shows a clear development towards the privatisation of urban public space and with it all sorts of restrictions regarding the types of people and kinds of behaviour that are welcome there and those that are not (Minton, 2012; Lashua, 2013). These rules that are not openly communicated are however, heavily safeguarded by private security companies watching and patrolling the area and its boundaries with the power to expel anyone who does not abide by the rules (Minton, 2012). Liverpool One is therefore a clear example of how public private partnerships as part of entrepreneurial strategies facilitate polarisation and socio-economic inequality by designing out certain populations and at the same time stimulating others to consume and spend money (Harvey, 1989, 1992; Hall and Hubbard, 1998).

Liverpool One is not the only space in Liverpool's city centre that carries the characteristics of a privatised area because since 2005 and 2011, Liverpool also hosts two Business Improvement District that operate under a similar control and surveillance scheme (Pötschulat, 2013). Yet, the long list of Liverpool's entrepreneurial activities does not stop here considering current plans for the so called Liverpool Water's development by Peel Holdings which has been established as the largest ever regeneration project in the whole of the UK comprising a £5.5 billion redevelopment scheme of some areas of Liverpool's docklands (Jones, 2015). Furthermore, most recently Liverpool also hosts a regeneration website listing different investment opportunities, on-going projects and regeneration areas in the city aiming to make it easier for potential investors and developers to gather information about sites and administrative processes (Liverpool City Council, 2017f). Based on this comprehensive portfolio of regeneration activities and initiatives vis-à-vis observations that Liverpool is still a strongly divided city with regard to socio-economic aspects and hosts some of the UK's poorest communities (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; Sykes et al., 2013), Jones argues that it is a "paradigmatic model of a particular type of entrepreneurial governance" (2015: 467).

### Liverpool's Universities in the Local and Global Economy

In relation to the idea that to gain a deeper understanding of how these entrepreneurial processes play out locally, a focus on a specific locality and particular culture within is useful (Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Stevenson, 2003), I follow an approach that studies the embedding of a certain culture in place through an analysis of the lived experiences of some of the group members. Liverpool as a prototype of urban entrepreneurialism in the UK thus seemed like an appropriate setting for such an endeavour. Previously, I have argued that many aspects to the lives of students in cities can be situated within the concept of the entrepreneurial city and my research was positioned in this context. UK universities are often key players in urban entrepreneurial regimes due to their role as employers, consumers and property developers and because of the populations (students and visitors) that they attract to a city (Russo et al., 2007; Russo and Sans, 2009; Goddard and Vallance, 2013).

Liverpool hosts three main universities (Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moores University and the University of Liverpool) and for the cohort of 2015/2016 was home to almost 42,000 undergraduate students (HESA, 2017) constituting just under nine per cent of the whole urban population (Liverpool City Council, 2017i).<sup>27</sup>

Liverpool's three universities have a distinct profile and clearly set themselves apart from each other in their mission statements (The University of Liverpool, 2015; Liverpool Hope University, 2016; Liverpool John Moores University, 2017). The University of Liverpool is a Russell Group University, founded in 1881 and it is not just the oldest HEI in the city but also the biggest in terms of student numbers (The University of Liverpool, 2015). For the academic year of 2015/16 this university hosted in total 24775 students from which 19595 were undergraduates (HESA, 2017). It is also the biggest recruiter of international students, having attracted 4870 non-EU undergraduate students in the same time period, compared to 695 for Liverpool John Moores University and 20 at Liverpool Hope University (HESA, 2017). While Liverpool John Moores University has roots dating back to 1823, it most significantly functioned as a polytechnic for over twenty years and was awarded university status in 1992 like many other polytechnics all over the country, through the Further and Higher Education Act (McGettigan, 2013; Liverpool John Moores University, 2018). With a total of 21875 university students from which 18375 are studying on undergraduate programmes it is also the second largest university in the city according to student numbers (HESA, 2017). Liverpool Hope University is a teaching-led (rather than research-led) Christian university that was formed as a training college for women by the Church of England in 1844 (Liverpool Hope University, 2016, 2017). In 2005 the Privy Council awarded university status to this institution and since 2009 Liverpool Hope is also qualified to award research degrees (Liverpool Hope University, 2017). With its comparatively rather short history as a university,

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<sup>27</sup> In their character as specialist HE institutions, some reports also list The Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA) as well as the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine as contributing to student numbers but out of the two only LIPA offers undergraduate programmes which in 2015/16 recruited 720 students.

Liverpool Hope also constitutes the smallest HEI in the city with a total of 4940 students from which 3935 are studying undergraduate degrees (HESA, 2017).

All of these three universities establish a connection to the city of Liverpool in their mission statements and strategy plans but do so to varying degrees. Liverpool Hope University's comparatively rather short corporate plan emphasises the desire to engage students in the cultural life of the city and to foster cultural partnerships but does not provide much information beyond these statements (Liverpool Hope University, 2016: 4). In referring to themselves as a "pioneering modern civic university", Liverpool John Moores makes this connection more explicit in listing partnerships with businesses and cultural organisations of the region as well as mentioning their "corporate charity initiative" that links up students with local volunteering opportunities in for instance, homelessness charities or counselling services (Liverpool John Moores University, 2018). Furthermore, Liverpool John Moores' strategic plan emphasises to continue the establishment of the university as a self-proclaimed anchor institution in the city in order to facilitate the integration of the HEI into the life of Liverpool and its non-student residents (Liverpool John Moores University, 2017).

The University of Liverpool offers a rather lengthy impact statement to explain its connection to the city, the wider region and its global ties. The current Vice-chancellor, Dame Janet Beer, makes this network explicit in the foreword to the document by stating that "[t]he reputation and profile of the University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom and overseas is intimately connected to the city of Liverpool [...]" (The University of Liverpool, 2015: 3). In summary, this impact statement attempts to establish the university as a major contributor the economy of the Liverpool City Region in offering various numerical values indicative of the amount of jobs that are created and the type of spending that comes from the institution and the populations it attracts (The University of Liverpool, 2015). In doing so the University of Liverpool establishes itself precisely as the kind of actor that works in and facilitates the strategies of entrepreneurial city governments in taking on the role of an employer, a consumer, a property developer and a place maker (Russo et al., 2007; Russo and Sans, 2009; Goddard and Vallance, 2013). Based on these

observations as well as the fact that the University of Liverpool is the oldest and largest HEI in the city, I decided to focus my research on undergraduate students enrolled at this institution.

### The Pilot Study in Liverpool

The pilot study in Liverpool was conducted in November and December 2014 with four undergraduate students. Since undergraduate students make up the largest part of the student population in Liverpool, I decided that I would focus my research on them. For ease of access in the pilot study, all of the participants were recruited in lectures delivered within the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology of the University of Liverpool. Since the testing of the 'city diary' method proved unsuccessful I did not make use of this technique in Liverpool. However, all of the participants in the pilot study completed the autophotography task, had a semi-structured photo-elicitation interview with me and three out of four also went on a walking interview. For the Berlin pilot the autophotography method combined with the interviews using the photo-elicitation technique proved very valuable and this observation was confirmed if not even highlighted by the pilot study in Liverpool. More will be said about the application of this method further on, suffice to say here the inclusion of photography contributed to a relaxed atmosphere during the interview and enabled me to collect rich data. Whereas I have argued previously that Berlin was not suitable for conducting walking interviews, the Liverpool context was ideal for this type of method due to the walkable scale of central areas of the city.

Besides the realisation that all of the methods seemed suitable to investigate the research questions and relate to the participants and the research setting, another insight from the pilot concerned the status of the participants. Prior to starting my research, I decided to focus on undergraduate students from the University of Liverpool only, in order to be able to establish sufficient depth. Second and third year undergraduate students showed an interesting development in terms of their engagement with the city. In contrast to that, the first year student had only spent three months in Liverpool by the time of the interview and had only recently started

to develop some kind of attachment to the city. As a consequence, she also felt less confident in terms of talking to me about 'her Liverpool'. Because the research is about students' relationship to Liverpool and possibly time is an important factor in the development of that I decided after the pilot study that I would focus on recruiting second and third year students (although I would not deny access to other undergraduate students who might want to take part).

## 5.2. Fieldwork Proper

### Recruitment of Participants

The recruitment process for the actual study took place in January and February 2015. Similarly to the pilot study and after obtaining the permission of the lecturers, I went into modules for second and third year undergraduate students and gave a short presentation about my research followed by passing around flyers (see Figure 5.1.) and a sign-up list for those who wanted to take part. In total, I presented in twelve lectures from all faculties with class sizes ranging from 15 students in a history module to 250 students in a management lecture. Everyone who signed up would get an email from me with more details about the study and what their participation would entail and the request to reply by providing some personal information. Although about 90 people signed up for the study in the lectures, only 12 went on to communicate with me and take part. Besides the recruitment in lectures I also posted an announcement on the website of the University of Liverpool through which I gained another four participants. Furthermore, I put up posters with tear-offs in labelled areas all over campus but I was not able to recruit anyone through this method.

Overall, I found the recruitment period a fairly difficult and stressful process because the amount of participants who actually took part in the study seemed comparatively small to those who had signed up, not even thinking about the amount of students I had presented to in lectures. Probably the main reason for these difficulties is that I was expecting a lot of effort and engagement from the participants in order to take



Figure 5.1. The flyer I made to recruit participants.

part without offering any compensation for their work and time. Furthermore, although I specifically stated that photos of snapshot quality are absolutely sufficient, the autophotography task required them to own a camera or a smartphone and be willing to take pictures. Finally, the way I presented to them presumed that they would have a relationship to Liverpool and experiences to talk about, something that perhaps not everybody has.

Since the pilot study in Liverpool confirmed my methods, I decided that its participants can be taken over into the actual study giving me a total of 20 participants, all of them full time undergraduate students at the University of Liverpool. Although the study was ‘advertised’ through the different channels as mainly targeting second and third year students, I still received participation requests from five students who have spent less than a year in Liverpool and also allowed them

to take part. Overall one first-year, five second-year, ten third-year and four exchange students took part in the research from across the university. Through the help of these participants, I was able to conduct 19 photo-elicitation interviews (two students wanted to be interviewed together) and ten walking interviews.

### Autophotography and Photo-Elicitation Interviews in Practice

The fieldwork with the participants who had not already taken part in the pilot study took place from February to May 2015. The first task was the autophotography project in which I asked the students to take pictures of places in the city that are important for their everyday life. I limited the amount of pictures to a maximum of ten per person, for the purpose of being able to manage the data and not overburdening my participants. Once the participants had replied to my initial email providing them with information on the study we would keep in touch via email or text message. Text message communication was very useful for short enquiries about how they were getting on with taking the pictures and when they would be available to meet up. Many participants did not seem to check their university emails regularly or even reply and text messaging was an easy and convenient way to keep up the communication. Furthermore, this initial contact that was quite extensive with some participants already created a sense of familiarity. Whereas some participants only took a few days to take the pictures and meet up for the interview, with most of the participants it was a longer process of communicating, reminding, and arranging the meetings. Once the participants were finished with taking the pictures, they would send them to me either via email, Whatsapp or through uploading them in a private dropbox folder that I created.

For the interview, I would print out the pictures and assemble them on the table in front of the participant asking her or him to start with any photograph by telling me what I can see in the picture and what their personal connection to the space is. Based on their answers I would ask follow up questions. Generally, the photos seemed to offer an uncomplicated opening into the conversation, the participants gave the impression of being comfortable in describing the pictures, and the photos



seemed to give them more confidence in the interview situation. Furthermore, the pictures made them enclose personal and very specific information about their lives in Liverpool very soon, something that might have not been achieved by only asking questions. Perhaps it could be said that by visually sharing their most important urban spaces I made a step into their lives that would have been difficult to establish without the visual material. In general, I felt that the photos were valuable for building up a connection to the participant, to develop a closer understanding of them, as well as for the purpose of collecting rich data.

Almost all of the photo-elicitation interviews took place in a Liverpool café, a five minute walk to the south of the university campus. In choosing the location, it was important for me to find a place that was public, offered enough space, was moderately quiet and had a relaxed environment. The fact that the café was somewhat off campus was important because I wanted my participants to have a slight separation from university and their daily life but at the same time it had to be easily reachable. Most of my participants had never been to this café but a lot of them made positive comments about it which often sparked a conversation about areas in the city they still wanted to discover. In order to get to the café, I would meet the participants somewhere on the university campus and then we would walk there together. These walks were very helpful in breaking the ice and having time to talk to them without immediately starting the interview. Although participation was voluntary and the participants did not receive any compensation I paid for their drinks (within reason) while we were in the café.

In terms of time spans, the shortest interview lasted about 40 minutes and the longest approximated three hours. The length of the interviews was dependent on the participants and what they wanted to convey to me. Whereas with some participants long and intensive conversations about aspects to their life in Liverpool were possible with others the conversation flow was different and the topics were exhausted faster. For my research, the photos were simply a way to start off the conversation with my participants. In most cases, it was aspects that they mentioned in describing pictures which sparked further questions and made it possible for me to direct them towards topics of research interest. Because of that, in some cases the

participant and I could be talking about one photo for half an hour just because of how the conversation developed. Once they had said everything they wanted to say and I had asked the questions that were important for my research we would move on to discuss the next picture in the participant's autophotography project. Usually the end of the interview was reached once all of the pictures had been talked about.

The autophotography technique did require some degree of effort on behalf of the participants but I attempted to keep that to a minimum. I told them that the quality of the photo was not of relevance for the study and emphasised that they do not have to travel to places specifically for the purpose of taking the picture. This was not necessary because the study is based on the idea that if a place is important to their everyday life they would spend time there anyway within a certain period of time. In addition, at the end of the interviews I would ask them whether any photos are missing in order to give them an opportunity to talk about meaningful urban places which they did not manage to include into their autophotography project. The fact that the participants had to engage with the task before meeting me was beneficial for the research because by the time we met for an interview it seemed that a certain process of reflection upon their spatial practices had already taken place which probably made it easier to enter and maintain the conversation with them. Furthermore, some participants seemed slightly nervous when meeting me and uncertain about what to expect from the interview. Probably this was also due to the anticipation of going to an informal setting like a café with someone who they did not know. However, when I told them that I wanted to have a conversation with them about the pictures that they took and their life in Liverpool in general they seemed to start feeling more comfortable in the interview situation. It was important for me that they would choose the sequence of the photos trying to give them more power of the situation and the course of the interview. Most importantly however, is that the photos only constituted a starting point for the conversation and based on the participants' description a longer conversation about their lives in the city was able to unfold.

## Walking Interviews in Practice

One of the main objectives of the research methods was to achieve a closer understanding of the lived experiences of the participants through the inclusion of visual and mobile methods. Based on this research aim, the methods of autophotography in combination with photo-elicitation interviews as well as the go-along as a type of walking interview were introduced. In order to gain participants for the go-along, the final question of the photo-elicitation interview was whether the participant was willing to have a walking interview with me and I explained to them that the purpose of this interview is to get an understanding of how they use and perceive the city centre environment.<sup>28</sup> Although only half of the participants went on to also take part in a walking interview, my general impressions from these walks and conversations was that I was able to get a sense of a collective position; the routes we walked on, the areas we moved in and the way they were made sense of were similar for several of the participants.

The walking interviews were conducted in a time period from December 2014 to May 2015. I would brief the participants by telling them that it concerned how they perceived and used the city centre environment and that they would decide on a meeting point and route with me walking along asking questions on the way and engaging them in a conversation. It was important for me that we would pass by places and streets that are of relevance for the participants' lives, and I also asked them to be explicit about any kind of thoughts about the environment that come into their minds, based on the idea that in walking interviews the environment serves as a probe and elicits certain comments and conversations (De Leon and Cohen, 2005; Jones et al., 2008). I met all of the participants in areas in or around the city centre of Liverpool and the average walk lasted just under an hour; the shortest was approximately 30 minutes and the longest just over two hours.

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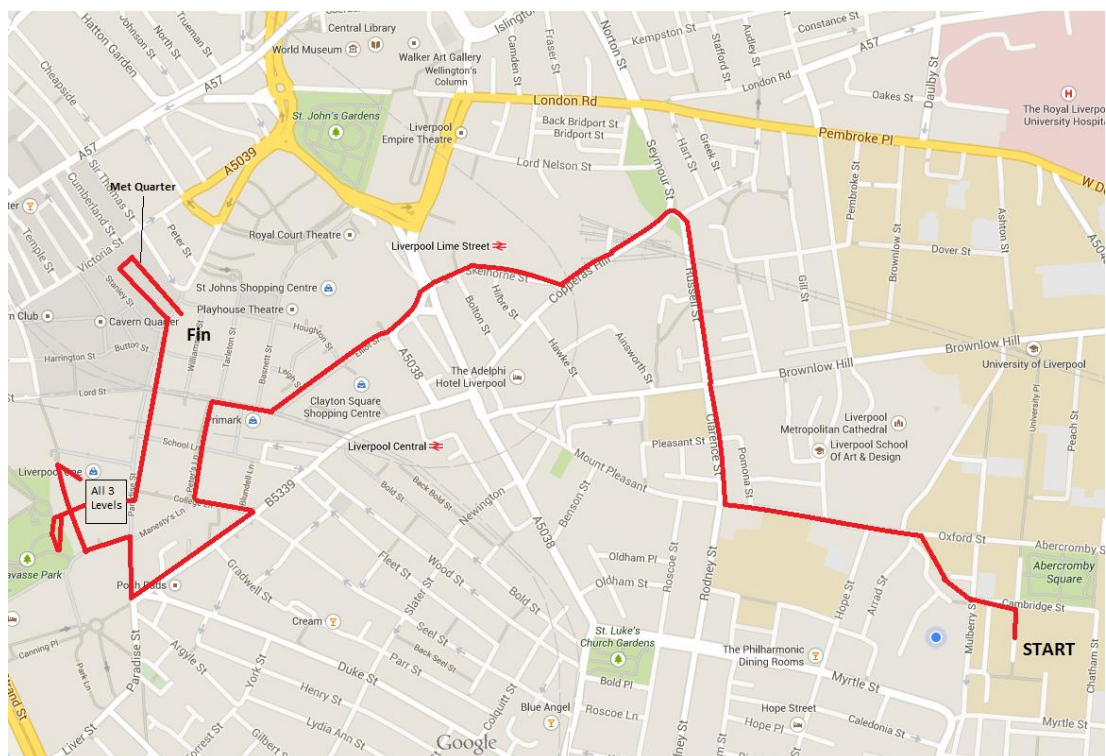
<sup>28</sup> Asking the participants face-to-face at the end of the photo-elicitation interview about their willingness to further participate in the research might have exerted some pressure on them to positively respond to my question. I was conscious of that and in the subsequent email conversations with them it was important for me to ask this question again in order to give them the opportunity re-think their decision.

Before starting the walking interviews I considered the recording of the interviews carefully. While some recommend using a video camera which has the advantage of being able to attribute the spoken word to the exact location of where it was said, I decided against this option for several reasons (Jones et al, 2008; Pink, 2007). First of all, the difficulty of walking, talking and filming at the same time has been pointed out by researchers who have made use of this method (Evans and Jones, 2011). Furthermore, I anticipated that some of my respondents might feel uncomfortable about the use of a video camera and the possibility of being filmed or attention being drawn to the situation. The conversations I had with the participants while being on the walk were either of a general nature or we would specifically talk about the environment which would also be named. Because of that, the audio recording contains the most important geographical references and the data generated by the video might not have added anything to this research. Lastly, the open air shopping development Liverpool One which takes up a substantial amount of land in the city centre is privately owned by the Grosvenor Group which requires a licence for anyone wanting to film in the premises.

In order to record what my participants said on the walk I used an external microphone for my dictaphone. While the participants put the actual gadget in their pocket a wire would connect to a small external microphone which they would pin to their jacket, collar or scarf. I was impressed with the good quality of the recording through this method, although that said I (sometimes awkwardly) had to make sure to always walk on the side of the microphone so that my voice was also picked up. For all of the participants walking seemed to be the main method of movement through the city centre although one participant suggested to go on a run (which I had to decline). Though the participants had different ideas about the boundaries of the city centre and what it entails, all of these conceptions were within a walkable distance and no one contested that there is no city centre, a different one or more than one.

Inspired by the research of Evans and Jones (2011), from the start of the walk I also used a GPS tracking app which recorded the route we walked on and based on this data I created maps after every walk containing the exact route (an example of such

a map can be seen in Figure 5.2.). Therefore, the data I received from the walking interviews were transcripts of what the participants had said as well as maps. One of the main ideas behind the maps was that possibly they could convey additional information for instance, with regard to offering a visualisation of the spaces that we had not walked in. I also thought about the possibility to overlap all of the individual maps to get another insight into similarities and differences of the participants' pathways in the city. However, when writing the analysis of this research it became apparent to me that all of this information is conveyed in the interviews and that with much greater detail. This observation made it difficult to justify the use and display of the maps. During the course of this research, embedding the maps in a meaningful way was a recurring puzzle and concern and it led to a more existential engagement with maps and their content. Maps have often been discussed critically for instance, with regard to the power of the creators to reveal and disguise information according to their own interests (Scott, 1998). This is based on the general assumption that maps construct a specific reality but are often treated to be an objective representation of the world (Harley, 1992). It is also conceivable that many commercial organisations in Liverpool have an interest in studying how students



**Figure 5.2.** An example of a map of a participant's route through the city centre during the walking interview. I created this map from the data collected by the GPS tracking app. (Map ©Google)

move through the city centre environment and what their pathways are. Based on all of these considerations combined with the observation that for my research they offer little additional insights into the lives of the participants, I decided to not further discuss or display the maps in this thesis.

Something that became apparent in the pilot study and was confirmed in the actual fieldwork was that the walking interviews seemed to add to the study in a different way than previously conceptualised. Some of the literature suggests that the environment serves as a natural probe to encourage a conversation about it and reveals knowledge and everyday perceptions that the participants might not even be conscious of outside of the environment (De Leon and Cohen, 2005; Jones et al., 2008). Because of that I expected interviews that would largely be about the immediate environment but this assumption could hardly be supported in my research. In most cases, the environment was only referred to when we passed by places which were particularly relevant for the participants' lives. Although I sometimes made attempts to encourage them to say more about the immediate environment, I realised very quickly that it interrupted the flow of the conversation and was not of relevance to them. Instead, what made the walking interviews valuable was that they offered another opportunity to go even more into depth about topics that were previously mentioned in the photo-elicitation interviews. However, especially with regard to relevant places in the city centre, being in this environment enabled the participant to be more precise about their habits and perceptions, something that was difficult to do in a settled café environment.

### Relating to the Participants

Any type of (social) research reveals as much about 'the researched' as it does about the researcher (Madge, 1993: 295) and "fieldwork *is* personal" since it is a mediation process between the worlds of the participants and those of the researcher (England, 1994: 85). Feminist methodology has been at the forefront of recognising the importance of considerations regarding positionality and reflexivity in the research process in arguing that any type of knowledge is always situated and not an objective

account of what is going on (e.g. Haraway, 1988; McDowell, 1992; Rose, 1997). The concept of positionality emphasises that to some degree the researcher is always an outsider and an insider with regard to the participants and profoundly influences the creation of knowledge by asking particular questions, communicating in a particular way and interpreting the accounts of the participants (Haraway, 1988; McDowell, 1992; Madge, 1993; Gibson-Graham, 1994; Rose, 1997; Merriam et al., 2001; Deutsch, 2004). Irrespective of the participants' situation in the world, in the research process the researcher finds herself in a powerful position with regard to the creation of knowledge about the lives of the people she is studying (Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997).

Reflexivity involves the process of recognising that my position in the world profoundly influences every aspect of the research process and its outcomes and it also includes a critical examination of the power structures that are at work (McDowell, 1992; Dyck, 1993; England, 1994; Moss, 1995). However, while an awareness of these dynamics is key to discussions around situated knowledge, Rose (1997: 311) points out that "the search for positionality through transparent reflexivity is bound to fail". Full reflexivity in many ways assumes that the position of the researcher and those of the researched can be clearly demarcated in a matrix of power and thus that 'the self' and 'the other' are in theory and practice entirely knowable entities. Instead Rose argues that:

[...] assuming that self and context are, even if in principle only, transparently understandable seems to me to be demanding an analytical certainty that is as insidious as the universalizing certainty that so many feminists have critiqued. (1997: 318)

Therefore, while the concepts of positionality and reflexivity emphasise the role of the researcher in the creation of knowledge they particularly serve to question positivistic notions of objectivity and universal knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997). In contrast, the research process and particularly the relationship to the participants is characterised by intersubjectivity rather than objectivity; it is characterised by the negotiation of a position that allows meanings to be shared and discussed (McDowell, 1992; England, 1994; McLafferty, 1995; Moss, 1995; Merriam

et al., 2001). To put it in Donna Haraway's words: "Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*" (1988: 581); it indicates that the researcher is in a position of "betweenness" and that the findings are always a product of the individual standpoints of those involved in the research and the common level they created to discuss these standpoints and share meaning structures (Katz, 1992).

Reflecting on my positionality as a white, middle-class woman during the fieldwork process has been a central practice for me and writing myself into the construction of knowledge and findings is an essential aspect of the frame analysis approach that will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. In general, I very much enjoyed the interviews and the overall fieldwork process because it enabled me to get in touch with people that I would have probably never met under different circumstances and hear about their life and experience of Liverpool. I am very grateful to all of them for putting in the time and effort to take part in my study and conveying me so much about themselves. Throughout the course of my PhD, I was interested in the notion of participatory research especially with respect to the idea of giving back to the people who took part in the study. One of the ideas I consider was to organise an exhibition with the photos of my participants and quotes from the interviews but this would have proven rather difficult with regard to the promised anonymity. Another issue was that I specifically encouraged my participants to hand in photos in snapshot quality and they might not have wanted me to display these often hastily taken photos in public. Overall, I was not able to think of something that would benefit my participants in particular or students as a whole so I decided to contribute to the broader principle of the need for volunteers in scientific research. Over the course of my PhD, I took part in dozens of surveys and experiments from the School of Psychology at the University of Liverpool, following the reciprocal logic that each volunteer in my research either counts for one experiment or for three online surveys.

Spending time with my participants did not just make me reflect on their lives in the city but also on my role as the researcher in the interview situation. To most of them it was not clear what a PhD student does and I had the feeling that they were unsure whether to put me into the category of being an academic or a fellow student. In





**Figure 5.3.** An experiment from the School of Psychology involving an EEG scan and olfactory stimulation that I took part in.

meeting them I tried to establish an atmosphere that was closer to meeting up with a friend rather than a distant researcher. I wanted to facilitate a conversational tone instead of a question and answer dynamic. Part of this research is about how they construct their lives in the city, a spatial and social practice that is contained in the notion of the student experience (as I will explain later in this chapter). Because of that it was important for me to be able to ask questions or let them explain concepts and notions without sounding naïve or suspicious. I felt that the fact that I am not from the UK and not a native English speaker, an outsider (Merriam et al., 2001), gave me an advantage in verbalising these.

However, despite the mainly positive reactions to me and my interview approach it also made me aware that I was playing a role if not even pretending a certain degree of curiosity, interest and friendliness which raises questions about ethics. Two participants in particular made me very aware of this role but also my standpoint as a person and a female researcher. With one female participant I had a pleasant exchange of emails and text messages prior to the meeting but I noticed during the course of the interview that I had some reservations towards her. She was not unfriendly in any way and it was not the case that she had views that might generally be contestable, such as racist opinions, but I thought that her account of herself was not coherent. For instance, she started off the interview by telling me about an appalling event in a park in Liverpool in which she was body-shamed and verbally and physically attacked by a group of boys. Yet, later in the interview she would forcefully

reiterate that Liverpool is one of the safest places on earth. These types of contradictions kept on coming up in the interview and although I realised that I was in no position to contest her views or even argue with her it made the encounter more difficult.

The second case that made me question my role and adopted approach concerns the gendered nature of interviewing. In total six out of 20 participants were male students and although I could see a slight differences with all of them in contrast to interviewing women (for instance, in terms of conversation topics and the dynamics of the situation), one participant stood out in particular. Although I had never asked about it specifically, the participant conveyed a lot of very personal information about his desires, regrets and insecurities mainly in terms of relationships with women. His body language and some of his comments about the interview situation started to make me feel uncomfortable. On the one hand, I was not sure if he was sincere or telling a story and on the other, I had the feeling that he was mistaking the interview situation with something like a date. Because of this, I had to distance myself from him in my behaviour and speech, something that impacted the interview even more negatively. During the course of the interview, the situation started to relax again although he kept on talking about very personal issues that in many cases were irrelevant to the topic of the research. Although these two interviews were probably the most challenging ones, they were also valuable because they made me reflect even more on my role and positionality. Perhaps, they also highlighted that the participants saw me as a fellow student rather than a member of staff or a distant researcher. While it was stated previously that the fieldwork process was very instructive but also enjoyable for me, I also had the impression that most participants felt in a similar way with several of them pointing out that they have enjoyed the conversation with me.

In returning to the broader objective of visual and mobile methods as reducing the gap between the researcher and the participant and enabling a closer understanding of their lives in the city, my impression was that the specific methods used for this research (autophotography, photo-elicitation and walking interview) were very helpful in achieving this objective and provided rich data. Despite the fact that photos

and maps form part of the information that was collected, the main data for the analysis presented in the subsequent chapters is constituted by the transcripts of the photo-elicitation and walking interviews. With regard to the underlying methodology of this research one of the central questions is then how the analysis of this qualitative data could be approached from a phenomenological perspective? This will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

### 5.3. Frame Analysis – A Phenomenological Data Analysis Approach

A phenomenological analysis tool would have to be sensitive to the previously discussed layers of meaning according to Schutz (1972) and it should be able to situate the individual's meaning structure inside a broader context. Sixsmith and Sixsmith emphasise this point and state that "[a]nalysis in an empirical phenomenology has two objectives: to understand as far as possible, the experience of others and to define some general framework that can account for that experience" (1987: 330). In other words, phenomenological analysis needs to enable the researcher to apply empathetic understanding by incorporating both the first-order constructs of the participants and the second-order constructs of the researcher. In the quest to find a framework that is sensitive to people's individual perceptions but also able to offer a collective account, another important component of a phenomenological analysis is recognising the role of the researcher in the generation of knowledge. Rather than arguing that the researcher is some kind of objective mediator simply transmitting the meaning structure of participants to a wider audience, a phenomenological analysis approach would have to acknowledge the researcher's positionality as an important influence on the results.

Erving Goffman's book *Frame Analysis – An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974) offers inspirational ideas towards such an analysis approach which is sensitive to people's experience of reality and the meaning they create around actions and events while also recognising the role of the researcher in the construction of a collective account of these. Goffman refers to the theories of Alfred Schutz as an important contribution to his work and establishes a phenomenological starting point

by postulating that he is not “addressing the structure of social life but the structure of experience people have at any moment of their social lives” (1974: 13). In other words, Goffman is not analysing how society is organised but rather people’s perceptions of it. Furthermore, similar to social constructionist theory, Goffman discusses the taken-for-granted character of everyday life and refers to this as an important object of inquiry. He states that “[t]he first object of social analysis ought, I think, to be ordinary, actual behaviour – its structure and its organization” (1974: 564). His work can be considered as an intellectual piece offering philosophical reflections on the analysis of meaning structures, a “mentalistic adumbration” (1974: 13) as he calls it, rather than a developed analysis approach. Like Weber, Goffman is interested in an analysis of meaningful action which he refers to as ‘guided doings’, characterising an action that is to some degree informed and intentional, and he introduces a theory in which these guided doings are interpreted within various layers of meaning to form complex frameworks of experience.

While only a few responses to Goffman’s book could be found, his work has mainly been interpreted as an account exploring how the world of experience is organised and in its reception has received praise by some (Jameson, 1976; Gonos, 1977) but was also heavily criticised by others (Denzin and Keller, 1981; Goffman, 1981). However, none of these reviews, whether positive or negative, have mentioned the potential of his work as a phenomenological approach towards data exploration. Probably the most well-known adaptation of Goffman’s reflections on frame analysis can be found in the work of Snow and Benford et al. (Benford et al., 1986, Snow et al., 2000; also Steinberg, 1998) and their research on social movement organisations and the significance of collective action frames in negotiating shared meanings to mobilise support for a specific cause. Although they discuss several tasks, attributes and processes in connection to the frames and reference this overall concept to Goffman, my general impression is that besides the adaptation of the term ‘frame’ and its meaning as an agglomerate of structures of experience and perception, most of their work is an elaboration of Goffman’s use of the term and bears very little connection to his actual reflections.

### *Strips, Primary Frameworks, Keyings and Fabrications*

Similarly to Snow and Benford's methodological work, this research comprises an interpretation of some key concepts of Goffman and their application to form an analysis approach. In order to do so, I need to revisit Goffman's work to clarify some of its essential ideas. The first step towards any type of frame analysis according to Goffman is constituted by a "*strip*" which he characterises to be "any raw batch of occurrence [...] that one wants to draw attention to as a starting point for analysis" (1974: 10-11). A *strip* can be any type of behaviour, an observation or an event. Individuals, who engage in a *strip*, assign meaning to this practice or event by applying a '*primary framework*' whose main purpose it is to inform actions and events happening in everyday life and to make sense of them. Through applying this framework, the first "layer or lamination" (1974: 82) of meaning is added to the otherwise raw *strip* of behaviour. Very similarly to Weber and his distinction between behaviour and social action, Goffman introduces two types of frameworks: "*natural primary frameworks*" interpret a *strip* to be unguided, not meaningful and purely physical (such as sneezing), whereas "*social primary frameworks*" are described to be guided doings which are meaningful and underlie certain aims and principles (1974: 22). Frame analysis is thus a tool that studies what people do and how they make sense of this.

A second layer of meaning is added through the notions of "*keyings*" and "*fabrications*". A *keying* can be understood as a re-interpretation of a meaningful practice creating some kind of pattern out of it (1974: 43-44). In doing so, *keyings* produce a transformation of the activity and provide a different reading of what is going on which can be closer or more removed from the *primary framework* of meaning of the *strip*. To describe a *keying* further, Goffman uses the analogy of moving from an original to a copy and also refers to the process of transcribing as a *keying* (1974: 79, 44). Similarly to a *keying*, a *fabrication* is another layer of meaning which can be added to a *primary framework* creating a transformation of the actors' interpretation of what is happening. However, in contrast to a *keying*, a *fabrication* involves a level of deception in which an action or event is presented to be something

it is not (1974: 83). Those who believe in the deception are considered to be the contained and those responsible for the deception are considered to be the fabricators. Goffman distinguishes between different types of *fabrications* for instance, benign *fabrications* which are not harmful to those contained in it and exploitive *fabrication* which serve the interest of the fabricator only, without considerations of the effects on the contained.<sup>29</sup>

*Keyings* and *fabrications* are two ways in which an action already meaningful in its *primary framework* is transformed into a broader pattern which can be closer or more removed from the perceived reality of the actor. Goffman extends this complex hierarchy of layers of meaning by introducing the idea of *rekeyings*, i.e. the *keying* of a *keying* or the possibility to transform a key into a *fabrication*, or a *fabrication* into a further *fabrication* (1974: 156). Together, the *strips* and their according layers of meaning are contained in the overall frame which is a structure surrounding and carrying all of those layers of meaning. Goffman describes the frame as follows:

It has also been argued that these frameworks are not merely a matter of mind but correspond in some sense to the way in which an aspect of the activity itself is organized – especially activity directly involving social agents. Organizational premises are involved, and these are something cognition somehow arrives at not something cognition creates or generates. Given the understanding of what it is that is going on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting. These organizational premises – sustained both in the mind and in activity – I call the frame of activity. (1974: 247)

The frame thus structures and organises perceptions and constitutes a simplification of the complex processes and hierarchies of meanings it contains or even hides. This, combined with Goffman's observation that actors tend to adjust their sense-making to fit within a frame structure resembles Berger and Luckmann's (1991) notion of a typification. As argued previously, a typification refers to the meanings assigned to habituated activities that constitute categorical and simplified knowledge of the

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<sup>29</sup> Goffman uses the example of playful deceit for instance, in a surprise party to give an idea of what a benign *fabrication* is (1974: 88-89). In order to explain the concept of an exploitative *fabrication*, Goffman gives the example of planting evidence against someone (1974: 108). Possibly this characterisation can be criticised as slightly flat for creating two binary opposites and by doing so lacking an account of how those contained play a part in the construction of the *fabrication*.

world. In addition, new activities and observations are made sense of within existing typifications. My interpretation of Goffman's writings position the frame as a social construction. The difference between a typification and a social construction is their level of institutionalisation that means the degree to which a concept is agreed on and shared between people. In contrast to a typification which might only exist amongst a small group, a social construction implies that a socially resonant number of people adapt their sense-making to its meaning structure and take this version of reality that is created in this process for granted.

It should be pointed out here that the interpretation of Goffman's work provided above constitutes a simplification of his reflections although at the same time I am aware that they might be difficult to follow on such an abstract level.<sup>30</sup> The remainder of this chapter will use Goffman's ideas to create a concise and clearer analytic tool. Central to Goffman's work is the idea that how people interpret the world and the knowledge they create around it, is based on their individual (yet socialised) perspective, an assumption that also forms the foundation of social constructionism and phenomenology. He refers to the notion of "the anchoring of doings in the world" (1974, 293) arguing that every framed activity comes from somewhere and goes back to the world and he uses the concept of the "biographical identity" (1974: p. 573) in explaining that there is an overarching entity which connects all of the frames of activities that people are involved in. With these considerations in mind, this means that not just the participant is contained in the frame but so is the researcher who has an important function in the interpretation of participants' meaning structures and sense-making processes.

### Towards an Applicable Analysis Tool

In practice, the development of this analysis approach took time, several deliberations with my PhD supervisors and myriad revisions. Figure 5.4. shows one of

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<sup>30</sup> Just to give an indication of what was left out, most of his elaborations on 'frame activities', such as theories of containment and 'frame misunderstandings', 'disputes' and 'vulnerabilities' just to name a few, will not form part of the methodological considerations of this thesis.

## FRAMING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

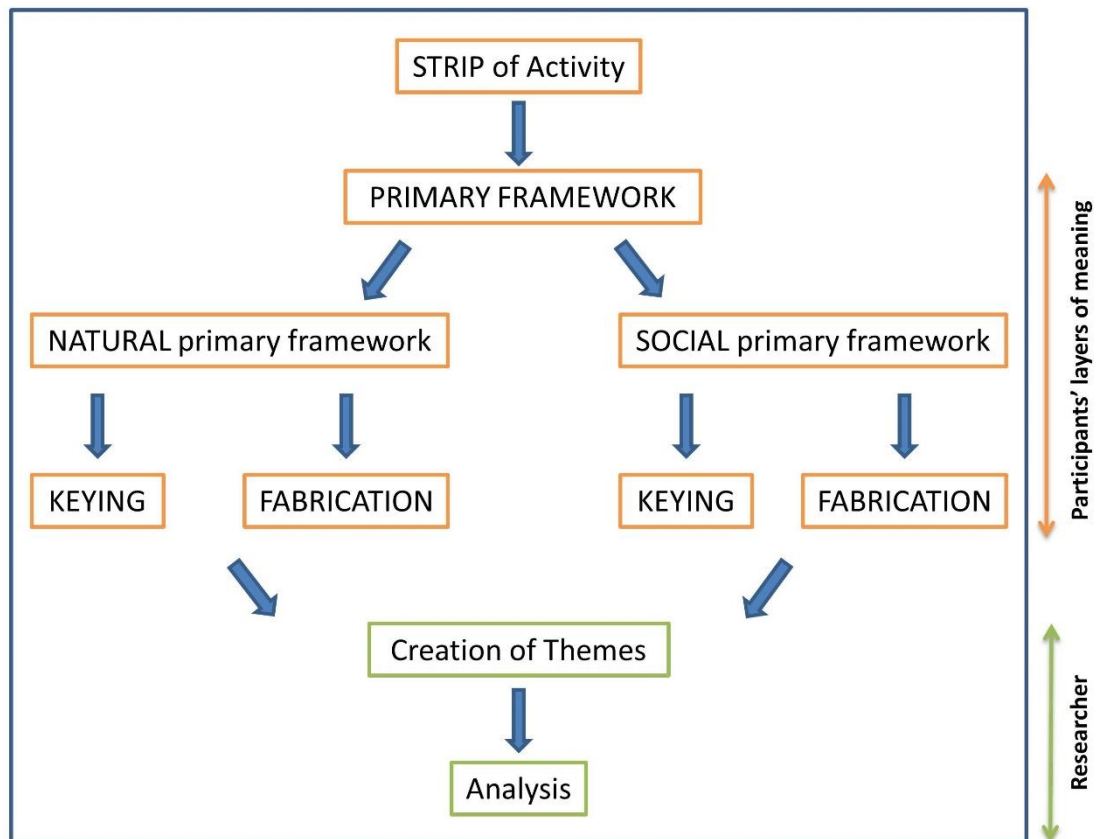


Figure 5.4. The first draft towards a frame analysis approach. The lack of clarity of this diagram supports the need to simplify Goffman's ideas even more.

my first attempts towards frame analysis inspired by Goffman, comprising the participant and the researcher in the same frame. This initial graph is based on the idea to include the moments in which an individual engages in a practice or makes an observation (a *strip*), assigns meaning to it via a *primary framework* and then interprets this meaningful activity through the notions of a *keying* or a *fabrication*. In this graph, the researcher's influence is exercised through the analysis of people's meaning structure and the creation of themes. Several problematic features can be detected in this graph whether it concerns the lack of accounting for the interview and transcription process, the positionality of the researcher or the attempt to frame the practice starting out with the moment it is enacted rather than the moment it is communicated in the interview. Furthermore, the development of this frame analysis tool made it apparent to me that Goffman's description of complex if not even endless layers of meaning would have to be substantially simplified in order to be turned into an applicable analysis approach.



Figure 5.5. shows the final version of the graph and the main amendments that have been made concern the following aspects: the omission of the *natural primary framework*, the starting point of the framed activity, and the involvement and positionality of the researcher. Goffman refers to the *natural primary framework* as identifying “occurrences seen as undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, ‘purely physical’” (1974: 22). This has been related to Weber’s distinction between behaviour and social action and his argument that only social action is meaningful and should thus be the main subject of sociological inquiry. Furthermore, this relates to constructionist theory arguing that anything can only be constructed in the social sphere which is why it is usually unnecessary to refer to something as ‘socially’ constructed (Hacking, 1999: 39). Because of these reflections, I decided to drop the notion of the *natural primary framework* which reduces an action to be in effect ‘just

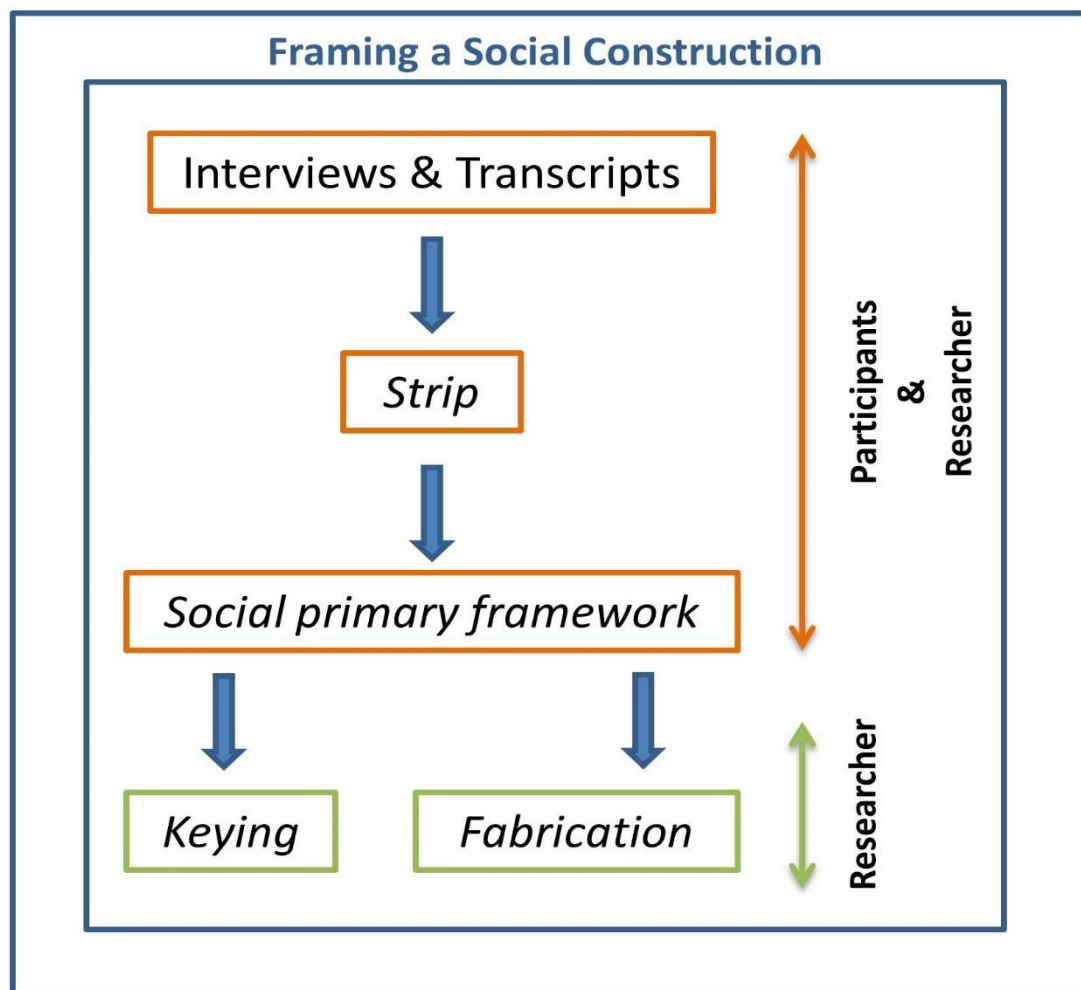


Figure 5.5. The final version of the frame analysis approach in a diagram.

natural', to focus exclusively on the *social primary frameworks*, so actions that participants recount as being made meaningful through social action.

Another major difference from the first to the second graph is the inclusion of the interview and transcription process constituting a different starting point of the analysis. It became apparent to me that I can only account for how *strips* and meanings were communicated to me but not for how they were actually enacted and rendered meaningful. This is based on the assumption that engaging in a meaningful practice and the communication of this to another person, a researcher in this instance, are two different occurrences. For Goffman, the interviewing and transcription processes comprise a *keying* of a *strip*, meaningful in its *social primary framework*. He therefore reminds us that data is not naturally occurring or waiting to be 'collected' by a research but is effectively made. Since in the frame analysis approach, the researcher has no way of determining whether what the participant communicates was actually what was going on, I have chosen to foreground the communication of practices and their meanings in interviews as the starting point for analysis. The interviews and specifically the transcripts then offer the possibility to identify the activities participants' engaged in and how they assigned meaning to them.

The final observation here concerns the role of the researcher, my positionality; considerations of this were absent from most of the framing in the first graph and were only involved in the themed analysis of the data, to the second graph where my influence is omnipresent. The sensitivity of social constructionist and phenomenological theory to the researcher's reflexivity has been mentioned several times. The second graph then recognises that my presence in the interview process has the potential to significantly influence the type of information the participants convey and how they do so. Therefore, by constructing the frame, conducting the fieldwork with the participants, and eventually also interpreting it, the researcher is involved in every stage of the data collection and analysis.


In practice then, the second graph should be interpreted in the following way. An interview is conducted and a transcript is created from the audio material. Based on

this transcript, which constitutes the participants' self-representations of what they do and why this is meaningful, the researcher identifies the *strips* and the *social primary frameworks* as they were communicated. Figure 5.6. shows an example of how this coding/analysis was conducted relative to a transcript of a photo-elicitation interview with a participant involving two highlighters of different colour marking out the *strips* and *social primary frameworks*. For the purpose of this analysis, I interpret a *strip* to be a term that bundles various practices. The main *strips* identified in this study are 'consuming', 'living', 'studying' and 'exploring' and they comprise practices, observations and events that broadly fall into these categories. For example, as the next chapter will show the '*strip* of consuming' contains activities such as engaging in nightlife, shopping and eating out. Each of the three analysis chapters is organised around a specific *strip* and discusses how the participants generated meaning around the practices that it contains (the *social primary framework*). Following this step, I

Transcription Laura

Strip of activity

Social Primary Framework



So this picture here is a picture of the block of flats where I live. So obviously that's my personal connection. I haven't actually... I've lived there since September and before that I lived on Smithdown whereas this is down by the docks so that's why actually the whole pictures have changed quite a lot since I moved to the new place because before they probably wouldn't have been the same ones. So it's just that it's quite a nice and quiet... a quiet street with blocks of flats.

What's the name of that street?

**Figure 5.6. A transcript of a photo-elicitation interview in which strips and social primary frameworks are marked.**

interpret this meaning structure to either be reflective of a broader pattern, a *keying*, or to constitute a contradiction in the sense that practices and/or sense-making processes stand in conflict to other accounts the participants gave about their lives; considered here as *fabrication*. Effectively the establishment of a *keying* allows me to draw together accounts of several participant while also relating these to existing research in the field. A *fabrication* is a tool to emphasise that the way people make sense of the world is never fully rational but bound up with intrinsic contradictions and inconsistencies. Eventually, after this kind of analysis was conducted with all of the interviews and transcripts, the researcher will be left with several *keyings* and *fabrications* which together form the frame.

### Framing the Student Experience

The frame that contains all of these meaning structures is considered here as a social construction with regard to its function of simplifying a version of reality that is taken for granted by the actors. As will become apparent below, in this research the frame is constituted by the notion of the student experience which contains what students do (*strips*) and how they make sense of this (*social primary framework*) but also allows to analyse the importance of space in discussing students practices. Initially, I considered the frame to be 'the student' in reference to the idea that it contains various practices and interpretations of what it means to be a university student but ultimately the term and what it entails is a social construction. However, something that became apparent in this research is that many of the participants summarised their time as students and especially the practices in the city that were involved in this through the notion of 'having a student experience' (sometimes they also referred to it as a 'university experience'). Even those that did not mention it themselves were able to relate to this idea when I brought it up in the interviews. Interestingly, this kind of terminology is also commonly employed by university managers and academics usually referring to various aspects around a student's university education.

In the literature about students and universities discussed in a previous chapter, the term student experience is used numerous times, often in a way that implies that being a student is about much more than attending university but never in a way that critically engages with the notion (e.g. Wilcox et al., 2005; Crozier et al., 2008; Holdsworth, 2009; Andersson et al., 2012; Abrahams and Ingram, 2013; Holton and Riley, 2013, 2016; Holton, 2015b; Rogaly and Taylor, 2015). In contrast to university managers, in the participants' notion of the student experience the university only seems to be one aspect out of a larger picture and there seemed to be a highly urban component to the notion especially with regard to the inclusion of places in the city in the discussion of what it means to be a student. As will be shown further on, there are many examples in the transcripts in which students relate to the idea of the student experience for instance, in their description of their first year at university, in comparing their expectations of what it would be like to be a student to their current perception of it or in reference to not being able to fully live up to all of the components it contains. Overall, it became apparent that students aspire to achieve the full student experience and evaluate their perception of their time as students in the backdrop of this notion and its supposed components.

There is a large field of research that studies the connection of the notion of 'experience' to consumer culture in the discussion of so called "experience economies". This is a concept that builds on the idea that after agriculture, manufacturing and service economies, the selling of experiences constitutes the emergence of a new type of economic activity (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999; Sundbo and Sørensen, 2013). The main assumption of this strand of research is that an experience constitutes a mental process perceived by an individual through an external stimuli with experience economies as the businesses of marketing and selling these stimuli (Pine and Gilmore, 2013; Sundbo and Sørensen, 2013). In its essence the concept of the experience economy describes a process of recommodification in arguing that it is about more than just buying a product or service but it is about buying a specific experience that comes with it (Schulze, 2013) and through this marketing ploy companies supposedly are able to increase the market value of what they sell. In this field of research it has also been argued that

place has been conceptualised as one of the most marketable 'items' in terms of experience, as pointed out by Svabo et al.: "A central feature of the experience economy is that places are designed for experience. Place is a commodity for consumption and it is designed to stimulate growth" (2013: 310). Tourism is argued to be a large experience industry that builds on perceptions of buying destinations and activities that are 'authentic' in the sense of being un-staged (Urry, 2005; Pine and Gilmore, 2013; Svabo et al., 2013). Based on this, a connection between place and the marketing of experiences can be established. This is important in order to understand the spatial component of the student experience. I am in many ways critical of the consulted literature about experience economies for instance, because of its focus on the value of experience for business innovation and profit generation and the perception that none of this literature sufficiently defines and deconstructs what an experience actually is (Snel, 2013).<sup>31</sup> However, the concept of experience economies contains many interesting ideas especially with regard to its ability to link the commodification of place and consumer culture to the term experience, an insight that will be important for the final analysis of the student experience in this research.

Raymond Williams discusses 'experience' as a keyword and speaks about "the problem of experience" (1985: p. 127), concerning the elusive nature but seemingly also changing meaning of the word. His work makes a strong case for either a critical examination of the term, or in some cases even a complete obliteration of it from academic work. For the purpose of this research, I have chosen the former option because I want to dissect what exactly the notion of the student experience refers to from the perspective of undergraduate students and I am specifically interested in studying the urban dimension of it. As such the social construction of the student experience entails the so called typification of the student, a concept that I will refer back to many times in this thesis. The typification of the student denotes simplified and categorical knowledge of what students are and do, taken for granted and seen

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<sup>31</sup> Together with Drs Marie Moran and Paul Jones, we are currently working on a paper that picks up on this criticism and aims to deconstruct the notion of the student experience through a key word analysis inspired by Raymond Williams and a discussion of the concept as it was used by the participants of this research (Pötschulat et al., n.d.).

as the dominant reality by the actors. These practices are enacted and made sense of within a spatial environment. This is what the construction of the student experience refers to. It studies the typification of the student with a specific emphasis on the significance of place in determining what it means to be a student. Considering the focus of this research which wants to establish how students relate to the urban environment and develop a sense of place within, the frame in this analysis is constituted by the notion of the student experience (rather than just the student) based on the idea that it enables the study of the importance of the urban environment in student culture.

In summary, frame analysis as it is applied here gathers *strips* and their *social primary frameworks* through conducting interviews and producing transcripts. General patterns but also inconsistencies are pointed out through the concepts of *keyings* and *fabrication* produced by the researcher. Eventually, the aim of the analysis is to establish what students do (*strips*), how they make sense of it (*social primary framework*) and how this can be interpreted (*keyings* and *fabrications*) in order to get a sense of how people produce and relate to the social construction of the student experience. Specifically for this research, I am interested in studying social action (or guided doings (Goffman, 1974)) of students in cities. I aim to explore how they assign meaning to their practices within the urban environment, in order to illuminate something about how they construct the notion of the student experience. A *strip* is a concept that bundles various practices under an umbrella term and renders them meaningful in the so called *social primary framework*. In going through the transcripts I identified the *strips* and their *social primary frameworks* according to how they were communicated by the participants. The second layer of meaning, and in contrast to Goffman's analysis also the final layer, is constituted by *keyings* and *fabrications*. *Keyings* are broader interpretations by the researcher of the participants' meaning structure detecting patterns in the account of several people. *Fabrications* on the other hand, refer to an inconsistency in the participants account for instance, when certain activities and their meaning structures seem to contradict each other. One of the most obvious *fabrications* identified in the analysis in the next chapter is the *social primary framework* of 'the poor student'. As the next chapter will show it was

noticeable that students made sense of their lives in the city as being poor when in effect the account of the practices they engage in (the *strips*) seemed to suggest the opposite.

## 5.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided some detailed and personal reflections on the fieldwork process with the participants. In order to get a sense of whether the conceptualised methods are useful in the study of students and their sense-making of the urban environment, I conducted two pilot studies in selected locations. The majority of the existing research about students in university cities focuses on locations and HEI situated in the UK but little is known about whether these process also play out in other countries. Berlin was chosen as an alternative case study site because of its potential to add a different perspective to the UK-centric research on students. While the pilot study in Berlin confirmed the suitability of the autophotography and photo-elicitation method, it also made the short comings of the 'city diary' apparent, a method that was subsequently removed from the research. However, probably the most important outcome of the pilot study in Berlin was the realisation that the inclusion of this case study site would constrain the possibility to establish depth which is why the research there was terminated.

Previously, urban entrepreneurialism has been established as an important backdrop and context to this research of students' lives in cities, especially the infrastructure and services that are targeted at them, were situated within this concept. Liverpool does not just host a large student population but it is also an archetypal entrepreneurial city in the UK that has taken part in all major urban regeneration policies and experiments. Against this backdrop Liverpool was chosen as the case study of this research and as the pilot study there revealed the conceptualised methods were very useful in order to get an understanding of what it means to be a student and how this is enacted in urban space. Despite some difficulties in the recruitment process, I was able to concentrate my research on undergraduate students from the University of Liverpool who are in their second or third year of



study. The first task for the twenty participants that went on to take part in the study was the autophotography project in which they took pictures of places in the city that are important and meaningful for their everyday life. The photos they took were then discussed individually in photo-elicitation interviews.

Overall, my impression from the use of these methods was that they gave confidence to the participants in the interview setting and enabled me to get access to rich and detailed information about their lives in the city. Furthermore, about half of the participants went on to also take part in the walking interview. The purpose of this method was to explore how they use and relate to the city centre environment of Liverpool. The participant decided on the meeting point as well as the route and I walked with them, engaging them in a research conversation along the way. While I expected that the immediate environment would be the primary conversation topic in these interviews, in practice this was not necessarily the case. Most importantly, during the walking interviews the participants and I moved through their lived spaces and being in these environments enabled the students to be more detailed about their practices there. The walking interviews thus added more depth to the exploration of how the participants relate to their urban environment particularly with regard to their engagement with the city centre of Liverpool.

The overall objective of the use of visual and mobile methods was to gain a close understanding of the lives of the participants and how these play out in urban space. My conclusion from the specific methods I employed in this research is that they achieved exactly that. My own positionality was an important consideration for me throughout this research process during which I often reflected on how my personal characteristics (e.g. being a woman, a non-native speaker, a mature student) impacted the type of information that was conveyed to me by the participants. While the research process gave me access to diverse sets of data including photographs and maps, I decided to focus my analysis on the transcripts of the photo-elicitation and the walking interviews.

A frame analysis approach inspired by the work of Erving Goffman (1974) was introduced here as a phenomenological analytic method of qualitative data. The

benefit of this approach is that it is sensitive towards individuals and the layers of meaning they create around their perception of reality but at the same it also offers potential towards giving a more collective account. As this chapter has discussed in detail, the frame analysis approach applied here is a simplification of Goffman's theories. It focuses on what people do (so called *strips*) and how they create meaning around these practices (*the social primary framework*). *Keyings* and *fabrications* constitute another, and for this analysis final, layer of meaning. A *keying* is a broader interpretation of an action and its meaning by the researcher, also in relation to the account of other participants. A *fabrication* is the identification of a contradiction in the participant's practices and/or meaning structure.

In the frame analysis approach, all of these analytical concepts are contained in the frame, a structure that in many ways conceals the complex layers of meanings that it holds. Essentially, the frame is a social construction in the sense that it simplifies a version of reality that people take for granted and use as an interpretation blueprint for new activities and observations. The notion of the student experience, a term that was commonly used by the participants but is also employed by various other people (university managers, scholars, accommodation developers, etc.) was established to constitute the frame of the analysis here. It is particularly the spatial dimension contained in the social construction of the student experience that I will draw out in this research. With this frame analysis approach in mind, in the next three chapters I will put its analytical tools into practice in order to explore students' understanding of the student experience.

## CHAPTER 6

### Consumption in the City

In the previous chapters, I have established the overarching motivation for this research, its methodology and methods and have provided reflections on how the fieldwork process worked out in practice. Liverpool is the case study site for this research, and this focus has been further refined to encompass undergraduate students mainly in their second and third year of study from the University of Liverpool, one of three universities in the city. It was argued that various aspects to student lives (e.g. the provision of leisure activities, the development of accommodation or the observed commodification of student culture on and outside of campus) have to be situated within a broader interpretation of cities following entrepreneurial strategies and as part of that attempting to attract all kinds of investment into the city (Smith and Holt, 2007; Chatterton, 2010, Ibrahim, 2011; Andersson et al., 2012; Holton and Riley, 2013; McGettigan, 2013; Smith et al., 2014; Kinton et al., 2016). Liverpool was introduced as an archetypal entrepreneurial city whose urban landscape is heavily influenced by strategies facilitating growth and economic development and as part of that sees the increasing in-movement of national and multinational companies influencing the housing and labour market as well as the provision of various services and entertainment offers (Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Couch and Dennemann, 2000 and 2003; Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004).

With regard to Massey's understanding of a sense of place (2007), this research aims to explore how students create a sense of place via practices that come to be embedded in what it means to be a student. Based on the frame analysis approach I grouped the activities and practices that students reported under four umbrella terms. The four *strips* that were identified in this research are consuming, housing, studying and exploring and the subsequent three chapters will offer a detailed analysis of how the participants create meaning around the urban environment through these practices. In all of the analysis chapters, quotes by the participants will

only be used to emphasise a common sentiment amongst several of them and highlight the assumptions they make.

This chapter addresses the *strip* of consumption, specifically looking at consumption practices that constitute an economic transaction involving the exchange of money for goods and services. In order to avoid a too general use of the term, I refer to consumption as an activity that has the goal of purchasing things and services which are not considered to be basic needs. Certainly the notion of what constitutes a basic need is debated and relative but commonly the need for shelter, nutrition, health and education are accepted components of such a definition (Hicks & Streeten, 1979). While there is much scope for a detailed analysis of the ways in which certain types of student accommodation constitute or go beyond the satisfaction of a basic need for shelter, in this chapter students' housing decisions do not form part of the discussion of consumption practices. I certainly leave open the possibility that students' residential choices are in fact consumption practices but since they were bound up with particular ways of moving through the city and formed one of the most important elements of students' understanding of the student experience, I decided to discuss housing decisions and the practices associated to living in a particular environment in a separate chapter (Chapter Seven). Furthermore, the fact that they are enrolled in university and pay tuition fees is considered here to be a prerequisite for the research rather than a consumption practice and will also be addressed separately.

However, as Urry (2005) has argued consumption does not necessarily comprise a literal purchase and is not only materialistic. With specific reference to tourists, he describes how their consumption practices are often times sensory (visual in particular) and symbolic (Urry, 2005: 111). Several scholars have pointed out how entrepreneurial cities promote the creation of spectacularised sites, objects and cultures and their visual consumption by visitors and local residents (e.g. Harvey, 1992; Zukin, 1995; Crang, 1997; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Stevenson, 2003; Urry, 2005; Miles, 2007). Also Zukin's (1995) notion of symbolic economies and 'cultural consumers' within builds on the idea that cultures, their practices and the spaces in which they are enacted can be consumed in a way that does not directly entail an

economic transaction. Harvey (1992: 77) characterises these types of consumptions as primarily symbolic with the purpose of adding symbolic and cultural capital to the consumer. At the same time, Harvey also points out that the distinction between symbolic consumption and literal purchases is not that clear-cut considering that symbolic capital originates in material capital (Harvey, 1992: 77).

The discussion of students' visual and symbolic consumption of spaces and objects in the city was part of the conversation in the interviews since the students pointed out that the development of a sense of place in the university city was dependent on this practice. However, this type of (symbolic) consumption will not be discussed in this chapter, but will form part of a further chapter that analyses how students engage with Liverpool as their city of residence. In this chapter, I will focus on those consumption practices that entail literal purchases and economic transactions only. At the same time, a discussion of people's economic consumption can never be completely separated out from symbolic and visual ways of consuming since these economic transactions take place in a spatial context that is also consumed in visual and symbolic ways. In what follows, I discuss the (economic) consumption patterns of the student participants, how these affect relationships to urban space and the meaning of these practices for the student experience.

The three main fields of consumption that were identified in the interviews as meaningful practices relate to shopping for fashion and technology, visiting cafes and restaurants, and engaging in nightlife. These will be discussed in separate sections of this chapter. The analysis presented in this chapter was sparked by the following research question: In which ways do students engage with the city centre environment of their place of study? This question was put up in order to get a better understanding of how students in Liverpool relate to the urban environment also beyond residential areas and the university campus. Discussions of Liverpool's city centre led to sometimes extensive conversations with the participants about their general consumption patterns and behaviour and why these are meaningful for their lives as students. Through identifying the practices that play out in this area of the city, referred to as *strips* in the frame analysis approach, it will be discussed how students make sense of them (referred to as the *social primary framework*). Finally,

wider assumptions will be drawn from the way students explain their consumption activities through the concept of a *keying* which refers to the detection of a general pattern in students' activities and the associated meaning structure or in reference to the concept of a *fabrication* calling out an incompatibility between different practices and associated meaning structures. Ultimately, the chapter will study the social and spatial significance of these practices and their associated meanings to the student experience.

## 6.1. Students' Financial Situations

Before studying the ways in which students consume and spend money in the city a more general argument is necessary with regard to their private financial situation. In a previous chapter, I described how the tuition fee system after the Browne Review in 2010 became dependent on income contingent repayment loans. This is a change in the financing system of HE that has been interpreted as a "privatisation of social risk" in the sense that it transfers most of the financial cost of attending university onto the individual who is then accountable for repaying the debt (Antonucci, 2016: 21). For students who entered university in September 2016 the available tuition fee loan covered a maximum of £9,000 per year and a maximum maintenance loan of £8,200 for students living in the UK, outside of London and away from their parental home (GOV.UK, 2017).<sup>32</sup> While the receipt of the tuition fee loan is independent from the parental income, the maintenance loan is not (GOV.UK, 2017). Every student who comes from a household with an income below or equal to £25,000 per year can expect to receive the full maintenance loan whereas household incomes above £62,180 will see the maintenance loan of the student reduced to a minimum of £3,821 per annum (SFE, 2016).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Students in receipt of the full maintenance loan thus have an income of approximately £683 per month.

<sup>33</sup> Please note that various other circumstances can change this rate or even make a student ineligible. The breakdown of the loans above considers a full-time undergraduate student who does not have any children or other caring responsibilities and is attending HE for the first time in her or his life.

Several scholars have indicated that the university system before and after the shift enhances existing social inequalities in the sense that it disadvantages people from lower socio-economic backgrounds whose parents are not able to support them financially and who are thus forced to rely fully on the government loans and sometimes also part-time jobs or who decide to live with their parents while attending university to reduce the debt (e.g. Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Clayton et al., 2009; Antonucci, 2016). While it is certainly the case that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in the long run are more disadvantaged either because they carry more debt or because a fear of debt has deterred them from even attending university, in my interviews another type of inequality became apparent. Some of the students who took part in this research are from wealthier families whose household income only makes them eligible for the minimum amount of the maintenance loan. However, several of these participants reported to struggle financially and to be strongly reliant on part-time jobs, a circumstance that affected their participation in the degree, due to the fact that their parents or guardians hardly contributed to their financial situation or even not at all.

A characteristic of the HE finance system in the UK is that it relies on public and private sources of funding and assumes that parents or guardians are willingly filling the gaps (Antonucci, 2016). However, in this research it became apparent that an assumed culture of parental financial support cannot be taken for granted and needs further inquiry. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who qualify for the maximum amount of tuition fee and maintenance loans are certainly more disadvantaged in the long-term with regard to repaying the accrued debt. However, in this research students who only received a minimal amount of financial support through loans due to the household income of their parents or guardians pointed out that rather than receiving the additional funds from family or care-takers, they had to take up part-time jobs to make up for it. Therefore, while the HE finance system certainly facilitates inequalities between classes, the situation is more complex with regard to financial disparities between students while attending university.

In a more general consideration of students' spending behaviour, Chatterton (1999) asked whether the notion of the economically poor student is a myth. He argued that

the money students receive through loans, grants, parents and part-time work makes them an important source of spending power in urban economies.<sup>34</sup> The tuition fees after 2010 (when the recommendations of the Browne Review came into full effect) have not changed much about this assumption considering that it is only after students graduate that the accrued debt weighs in and also in this research a similar observation to Chatterton was made. In some of my interviews it became apparent that the image of the 'poor student' persists among the participants who would often casually mention their spending behaviour and perceived limited financial resources. In relation to the frame analysis approach, this is part of their *social primary framework* in the sense that students make sense of their practices in the city (*strips*) by referring to themselves as poor and financially constrained. However, this meaning structure seemed to contrast with other accounts by the same students, in which they describe practices indicative of a certain engagement in consumption activities whether this concerns shopping, eating in restaurants, engaging in nightlife or a combination of these. In a similar way, the notion of the poor student was used by some to justify their choice of stores and restaurants which offer student discount or accept certain discount cards.

Poverty is a relative and relational category often measured through comparing the personal resources of an individual or household to those of the majority of the people in the country (Foster, 1998). For instance, in the UK, a person who earns less than 60% of the median household income is regarded to live in relative poverty (McGuinness, 2016). However, there are issues to defining and measuring poverty purely in terms of household income and several scholars have argued that supplementary measures are necessary to get an understanding of people's access to additional resources (e.g. support from family and friends) and to non-monetary goods and services (such as education, health care, and housing) (Piachaud, 1987; Nolan and Whelan, 1996; Ravallion, 1996; Bourguignon and Chakravarty, 2003). No

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<sup>34</sup> In their discussion of how multi-national supermarket chains move into working class neighbourhoods and take on community building roles there, Jones and Mair (2016) make a similar point. In capitalist societies, profit is made through different people, not just those with relatively large amounts of disposable income, but surplus value is also generated on the back of the poorer populations.



measurement of this kind will be conducted in this thesis since the focus is on students' sense-making and with regards to poverty this process seems to be bound up with certain misrepresentations.

In the *social primary frameworks*, the participants referred to themselves as poor and in need of additional resources. They mentioned this in relation to specific practices (forming parts of a *strip*) of only buying in certain stores or only being able to eat out and engage in nightlife a specific amount of times a week. However, at least on the surface this does not seem to indicate a strong level of deprivation. Because of that in the frame analysis approach the idea of the 'poor student' can be referred to as a *fabrication*. This means that students' account of their consumption behaviour contradicts the notion of being poor and needy. Participants took a certain type of spending behaviour for granted in the sense that in their minds it constituted a normal component of student culture almost like a basic need rather than a luxury.

However, implying that students are cash rich groups would also be problematic not just because several of the students who took part in this research relied on part-time jobs to finance their lives. A further contrast in the interviews came up between the described heavy spending on certain types of activities but at the same time a proclaimed thriftiness when it comes to other aspects which, from a different viewpoint, might be considered more essential, such as housing, food or transportation. For instance, one student explained how she never eats out, rents the smallest room in a terraced house in a studentified area and only shops at a discounter supermarket but at the same time she mentioned that each month she spends a larger amount of money on online shopping and nightlife. Another student admitted to spending a large proportion of his income on alcohol and nights-out but at the same time he is willing to walk to university every morning for half an hour in order to save the money on the bus pass. While students certainly have a degree of spending power in urban economies, it is not possible for me to assess the actual financial situation the students are in. In this sense, it might also be problematic to refer to them as cash-rich groups because while they seem to be willing to spend large proportions of their income on certain leisure practices they might do so in the backdrop of cutting down on other types of goods and services. The next sections of

this chapter will discuss their consumption behaviour in more detail especially with regard to shopping, eating out, and nightlife, (i.e. the practices that are bundled in the *strip* of consumption).

## 6.2. Shopping Routines in Commercial Urban Environments

Several students mentioned shopping trips around Liverpool's commercial area as a meaningful way to spend their leisure time, something that is considered here as part of the *strip* of consuming. This became especially apparent during the walking interviews in which some of the participants took me on seemingly routinised paths through Liverpool's shopping areas and sometimes even brought me into shops that

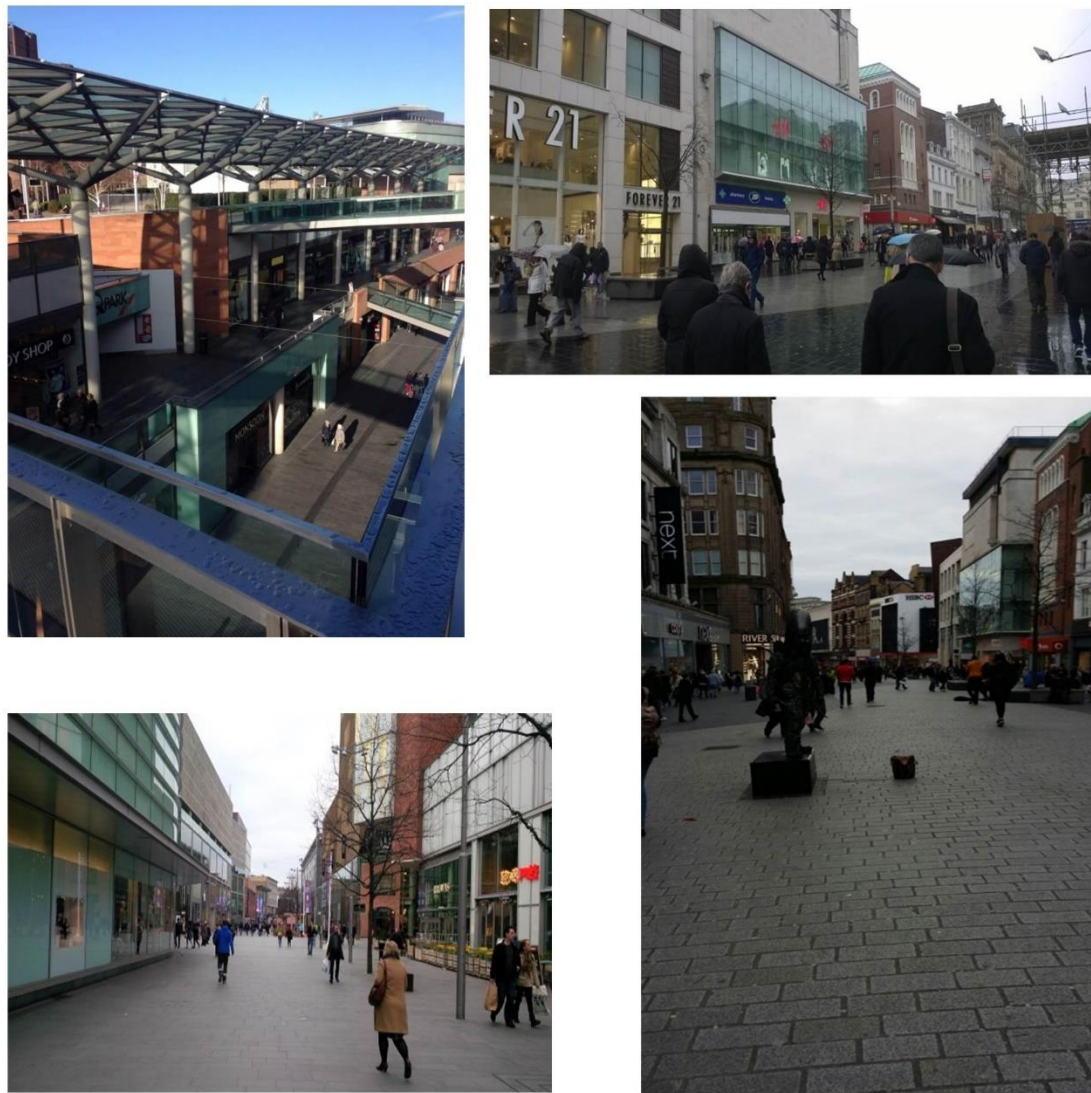


Figure 6.1. Images of the commercial shopping area in participants' autophotography projects.

they particularly liked. The walking interviews enabled some participants to give an extensive narrative of their shopping practices including their preferences for certain types of shops and shopping environments, and sometimes they made me aware of roads that interfere with the casual shopping atmosphere. Generally, several participants pointed towards the features of the built environment around them during the walking interview. For instance, some of the participants, who shop regularly, positively associate with a specific part of the shopping complex Liverpool One which through its architecture resembles a closed shopping centre environment the most.<sup>35</sup> While questions of (social) accessibility are always an issue with regard to private shopping and leisure complexes in urban areas (Zukin, 2010; Minton, 2012), in purely physical terms access to Liverpool One is possible at all times since no doors or gates close it off from the city. This as well as the different architectural styles of the environment were praised by some students arguing that it creates a bridge to the city, in contrast to a secluded area, making it an appealing space because rather than a shopping mall “it’s not a building, it’s a part of town” (Carlo).

With some participants who mentioned shopping as a regular pastime, an awareness of the immediate built environment results from the nature of their shopping trips. Rather than entering certain shops because they are looking for specific items, they described how they would effectively go around the shopping area to window-shop and browse. Important here is the *social primary framework* through which these shopping trips are made sense of. Most participants pointed out that although they spend money on shopping, these regular browses do not necessarily have to include an economic activity *per se* but are often a means to spend time with friends and accompany and advise them, as pointed out by this student: “But yeah we’d normally just go around here for a nosey. We wouldn’t normally buy anything. But we do tend to have just a passing of where we go” (Julia). Shopping activities were thus not made

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<sup>35</sup> The area I refer to is called South John Street and offers rows of shops on three levels with a pedestrianised area in between. While it might resemble a shopping centre it is open-air and not covered by a roof. In the display of students’ autophotography of the commercial shopping area (Figure 6.1.), the photo in the top-left corner depicts this part of Liverpool One.

sense of purely in terms of consumption but predominantly in a social way, as enabling relationships and friendships to form and be maintained.

Several other participants spoke about shopping as a practice that they engage in but in their *social primary framework* made sense of these activities in a different way and did not show the same level of routine as others. While they might spend similar amounts of money on shopping, in social terms it seems to be a less established practice with friends which might make it less significant as part of a weekly routine. Some participants also distanced themselves from the shopping in Liverpool One through mentioning a preference to shop in more alternative spaces such as second-hand shops that are not part of larger supranational chains. Most of these shops are clustered in a street called Bold Street that is not far from Liverpool One. However, these students saw it as a distinct part of the city centre that stands in contrast to the commercial shopping area. At the same time those who showed a preference for independent shopping stores overall engaged less in shopping with some of them mentioning a general shortness of money to engage in any type of shopping activity. However, even those students who made their preference for more alternative



Figure 6.2. Images of Bold Street in participants' autophotography projects.

shopping outlets known, from a practical point of view it was difficult to solely consume in this type of store which is why they often resorted back to Liverpool One. This attitude was summarised by one student, explaining that Liverpool One “is way too busy and has no charm at all” but at the same time “it’s such a big part of the city so you can’t really avoid it” (Stina).

Besides those who described shopping as a regular component of their lives in the city, some participants pointed out that they hardly ever engage in shopping activities and barely visit this part of the city centre and because of that do not have a relationship to it. For instance, in the walking interview with one student, when we enter the shopping complex Liverpool One, he introduces it in the following way: “So yeah Liverpool One. To be honest I’m not that fussed like apparently it’s good but I don’t like shopping” (George). Also other students expressed similar opinions about Liverpool’s commercial shopping area describing it as a crowded place whose main function it is to connect different parts of the city centre. Generally, it seems that for those students who do not engage in shopping this part of the city centre is merely an area that is cramped and difficult to pass through and ultimately they pointed out to not have any reason to be in this space. These statements also indicated that as a social space this area is not relevant for them, particularly in terms of facilitating friendships and social contacts.

Considering all of the different ways in which students engage in shopping, as a *keying* (so a wider interpretation of students’ practices and the meaning they assign to it) it becomes apparent that all of them have in common the social meaning that is attached to this practice. For those who engage in regular trips around Liverpool One following established pathways as part of spatial routines, shopping browses even though they might not actually contain an economic activity are a facilitator of social relationships regularly enabling them to spend time with their friends. Considering the social meaning attached to this practice, this would also provide an explanation as to why other participants do not use this area at all, based on the assumption that spending time in shopping environments is not an activity that is seen as a crucial practice to establish and maintain friendships.

### 6.3. Restaurants and Cafes as Social Spaces

For several of the participants shopping browses on established routes often involve more than just shopping. One student pointed out specifically that these shopping trips have some kind of out-of-the-ordinary character in which they are coupled with other consumption practices like having a meal in a restaurant to make it feel like a special day: “If I go shopping I sort of make a day of it and I go for tea as well. It makes more of like an event rather than just going shopping” (Sandra). A few participants mentioned eating out in restaurants in the city centre as an important part of their lives. While some explained that the choice of restaurant has relevance in terms of visiting places whose theme they find appealing or trying out newly opened venues, in relation to the previous *keying*, my impression is that the main function of these activities is again a social one. Whether it concerns eating lunch in bars and restaurants around campus or visiting comparatively pricier restaurants and chains in Liverpool’s city centre, the participants pointed out that this is a practice that is part of their routine with friends. Similar to what was said about the shopping trips, engaging in this kind of consumption practice seems to open up and maintain social relationships that would otherwise be more difficult to sustain.

While eating in restaurants was only relevant for a few of the participants, several of them mentioned visiting cafes, for instance, two students described a weekly visit to a café franchise on campus as a tradition that has evolved into something like a ‘club’ with more and more people joining. As part of her autophotography project also



Figure 6.3. Images of cafes in participants' autophotography projects.



another student took a picture of a café. Similar to those who visit restaurants, the main function of cafes described in the *social primary framework* is a social one. Participants would for instance, develop social routines around meeting particular friends there at certain times of the week or even see it as a chance for intercultural encounters, as one student described when explaining her picture of a café franchise in the autophotography project:

It is Nero outside in front of Nero and the reason why I take this photo is because I always meet up with my friends there and actually when I once walked on the street I met a person who, an English person, she can speak Chinese and she just talk to me in Chinese and we exchanged our phone number and we've contacted each other afterwards and we always meet up here also. (Luna)

In somewhat the opposite way another student pointed towards the social function of cafes during his walking interview, describing how his desire to be in coffee shops is countered by the fact that his social life does not take place near this type of consumption opportunity: "I don't really like going to coffee shops by myself but I like to meet people there and there is no one around this area anymore that I would meet so there is no reason to meet there" (Tom). What becomes apparent from this on the level of a *keying*, is that also the second consumption practice, visiting cafes, is mainly understood to be of social significance. This becomes apparent in quotes from participants like Luna and Tom who make sense of these spaces as predominantly meaningful for the establishment and maintenance of friendships.

#### 6.4. Night-Time Consumption

According to most of the students, what seems to be by far the most significant consumption practice relates to those activities that are part of engaging in nightlife and in contrast to the importance of cafes, restaurants and shopping almost all of the participants were able to relate to this in some way. From a spatial perspective, it was mainly Liverpool's city centre that was mentioned in connection with these practices, an observation that also became apparent in the walking interviews, as for instance, the following apologetic statement by one participant demonstrates: "Sorry this

[walking interview] is gonna give you a really skewed version of my attitude to Liverpool. It's not all just bars but it is mostly as well" (George).

In a previous chapter, I conceptualised night-time economies as an aspect of urban life that is heavily shaped by entrepreneurial strategies. It constitutes a primary example of the place-space relationship discussed here, with multinational companies shaping but vice versa also being shaped by the local context in which they establish themselves (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002, 2004). As Chatterton has argued, urban nightlife "is largely based around profit generation and selling the city through developing upmarket, exclusive leisure spaces, while marginalising local, independent and alternative nightlife and sanitising historic residual groups and spaces" (2002: 25). What Chatterton describes is the establishment of themed, colourful and spectacularised nightlife entertainment spaces that on the surface promote a vision of a city as fun and cosmopolitan. Yet, they create highly controlled and regulated environments which restrain local creativity and alternative ideas to nightlife. In doing so they contribute to the exclusion of all sorts of people who are not desired there or who are not able to join in. The interpretation of nightlife as a battlefield of different cultures wanting to claim their right to use and exist in a certain space is also taken up by Phil Hubbard who argues that the "night-time economy is imaginatively, symbolically and materially segregated on age, class and gender lines" (2013: 279). Student culture has been situated in a superior position within this field based on the observation that night-time providers particularly target students on certain nights of the week (Chatterton and Hollands, 2004). The commodification of student culture in the UK goes far beyond the HE system and the housing market and nowhere is this more apparent than when looking at students' nightlife practices and the types of activities and places they engage in during the night-time.



## Student Nights

Several participants have mentioned their engagement in 'student nights' as a crucial aspect of their activities in the city and a major component of student culture.<sup>36</sup> While the term 'student night' was commonly used by the participants, most of them struggled to actually define what it means to go on a student night with most replies revealing a *social primary framework* (or sense-making) that included two elements summarised in the following quote: "Cheaper drinks. Just that all the students go on that night so when you go out you are bound to bump into somebody you know, who you're not out with" (Kate). Student nights then have two characteristics: they are cheap (supposedly) and a lot of other students attend so the likelihood of meeting familiar people is high.

Most participants who engage in student nights seem to adhere to the *social primary framework* that they are cheaper alternatives to other nightlife events and venues. This perception was often explained to be something very obvious that does not require further consideration. Sentences like this one from Julia: "So we go to wherever there is a student night because it's cheaper", were very common amongst the participants. Assumptions about the cost-efficiency of student nights related to two aspects: the entry charge of a venue and the price of drinks there. Some students mentioned that several of the bigger clubs charge an entry fee of 'only' a few pounds for their student nights and how they feel that this is a reasonable price for the event. At the same time, several of them mentioned that other clubs do not charge an entry fee at all during the same night. For instance, Julia whose statement about the cheapness of student nights was quoted above, relativised this assumption by noting that student nights tend to be events that charge money in contrast to other venues that are not specifically targeted at students. However, rather than reflecting on the commercial nature of student nights she went on to explain that she never really

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<sup>36</sup> In this chapter I will use the term 'student night' in reference to a night-time event or party series put on by a commercial provider or company that specifically targets students by advertising it as a student event.

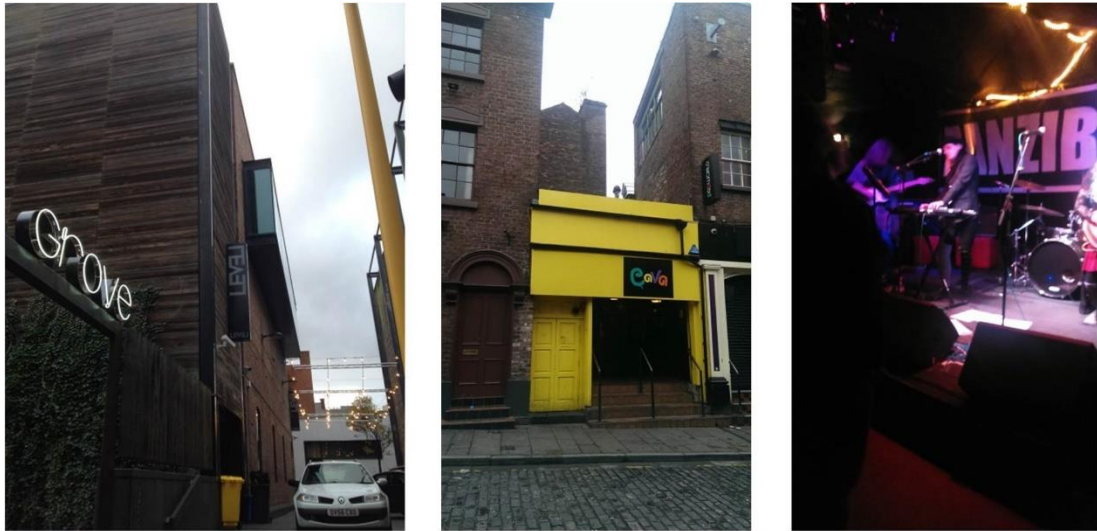


Figure 6.4. Images of night clubs in participants' autophotography projects.

thought about this aspect but finds it justified considering that the venue is a business trying to generate profit:

So if they charge money it's just them trying to make money for their business. Whereas like me thinking like I have no money and like oh no why are they charging. But I can understand why because every business just tries to make more and more money. But you don't mind paying it if you know it's gonna be a good night. (Julia)

Many of the participants who pointed towards the cheapness of student nights also explained that there are other venues which do not charge an entry fee at all. Therefore, the representation of student nights as cheap nightlife alternatives can be considered as a *fabrication*, that means making sense of these activities as cost-effective stands in contradiction to other accounts the participants gave.

The second component to student nights is the desire to be in a venue that attracts a lot of other students, holding the potential for visitors to meet people they are familiar with. My general impression from the interviews is that the social component connected to being in a space with people in similar life circumstances is probably the biggest attraction factor to student nights. For instance, some students emphasised that the potential to bump into friends from halls and university modules without prior organisation constitutes an important factor that makes them attend these events. Several participants pointed out that in their decision to go out, the crowd present in a certain venue has a large effect on the final choice of venue. Being

in a place that students perceive to be targeted at them only, rather than also at other city residents, turned out to be a strong indicator for their nightlife choices. Rather than making a decision based on for instance, the price of the entry charge, the music genre, the location or design of the venue, people mainly went for places which they assumed were frequented by a large amount of students as a default choice. Another participant summarised this observation through an interesting analogy: “So you just flood wherever the flood is rolling. You know student night if something is busy you tend to go there rather than going somewhere you’d rather go to because it’s not as busy” (Marc).

Previously in this chapter, consumption practices such as shopping and eating out have been interpreted as facilitators of social relationships and a very similar *keying* can be detected when looking at students’ engagement in nightlife activities. The emphasis on a place being busy as the main decision indicator (irrespective of whether in terms of other characteristics a different place might be more appealing), forms part of the *keying* of the social significance of consumption practices. At the same time, these practices do not just facilitate a closer relationship to an in-group but they also clearly demarcate who does not belong. This finding will be discussed further on in this chapter with regard to Bourdieu’s notion of distinction and students’ desire to distance themselves from non-student populations in their leisure practices.

## Nightlife and Social Time

Previous chapters have outlined the observation that student lifestyles have the tendency to run separate from the practices of other city residents and nightlife is one example of these segregated activities. Chatterton (1999) has pointed out that student nights have a particular time logic to them, mainly taking place during the week rather than on the weekend and how leisure providers are under the impression that the needs of students can only be met in separation to the needs of other residents. This time logic was also apparent with the participants of this research; for instance, one student in her *social primary framework* described how

one of the main reasons for her to go out during the week is to avoid the local population and to make sure that she is in a club with other students. Similar opinions were present in other interviews too for instance, this student who clearly distinguished between student nights and nights-out for the local population by affirming that “Friday is the student night whereas Saturday is the local night” (George).

On the level of a *keying* it can be argued that the participants established nightlife and its time logic in particular as a marker of distinction through which they distinguish themselves from local non-student populations and new students quickly and uncritically adopt these practices and their meanings. The only first year student in this research who at the time of the interview had just spent her first three months at university, described how there is some kind of ethos around not going out on weekends: “Weekends are quite boring at uni. I remember people saying it when they were at uni last year. They say weekends aren’t that fun because no one really goes out on the weekend” (Maria).<sup>37</sup> While some participants clearly mentioned a desired separation from non-student populations others showed a degree of confusion as to why they do not go out on weekends. When I asked the first-year student quoted above she admits that she is not sure why student nightlife is separate and puts forward the following speculation: “I think like drinks are like maybe more expensive or because of like the locals go out and they don’t really enjoy having like groups of 18-year olds near them or whatever” (Maria). It is interesting to note how she turns the argument about an active separation from local people around and considers that she might be a nuisance to them.

Interpreting consumption practices as an active form of segregation from other populations will form another *keying* in this analysis. Many students pointed out that nightlife has an important social function but the preference to be in places with large

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<sup>37</sup> In establishing the methodology of this thesis, I have introduced social constructionism and specifically the ideas of Berger and Luckman. Socialisation was mentioned as a concept through which typifications (the meanings of habituated activities that constitute an oversimplification of what is going on) are transmitted. The previous quote is one of many example encountered in the research process in which the participants indicated that they have gained knowledge about student culture already prior to attending university through primary and secondary socialisation.

amounts of other students also clearly constitutes a degree of segregation from non-student populations of the city. This interpretation is facilitated by the inherent time logic to student nights, taking place during the week instead of the weekend. Also in the interviews, several participants specifically mentioned a desired seclusion. While only one first year student took part in this research, it was interesting to observe her confusion regarding the reasons of this segregation indicating that the practice of avoiding nightlife on the weekend is part of a socialisation process. Several other students have also mentioned the argument that going out on Saturday is more expensive but whether student nights during the week are a cheaper alternative is again questionable.

Another aspect that is notable from this preconceived idea that Saturday nightlife is not for students is the distinction of students vis-à-vis 'the locals'. Neither of the participants who mentioned avoiding nightlife on weekends had a more nuanced account of the notion of the local population, whether that concerns their age, gender, profession, beliefs, etc. It almost seems as if students assume that if someone is not a student they must be a local person rather than recognising the various groups of non-local and non-student publics that might inhabit the city. This lack of care with regard to insufficiently distinguishing between different local populations is indicative of the social logic of student nightlife. The main objective is to spend time and be in a venue with other students only, and everyone who is not a student is conceptualised as not fitting in.

Intrinsic to the participation in student nights and the specific time logic in relation to going out on weekdays only was the development of a nightlife routine. Several students were able to list extremely elaborate weekly going out schedules, as the quote below exemplifies:

We used to have like a little routine so we go to like Camel Club on Monday, Tuesday we wouldn't really normally go out but if we did we went to Bumper on Hardman Street, and then Wednesdays we used to go to Medication and Thursdays we used to go to... there used to be Bamboo which is on Duke Street and then that closed down so we used to go to Igloo which is just by Concert Square and then that closed down. We used to go to Garlands a bit as well and then Fridays we used to go to Baabar on Concert Square. (Laura)

Usually nightlife venues advertise one or several nights a week as student nights but also put on events outside of these days with the main difference that they are not specifically promoted as being a student night. It was interesting to note how most participants did not seem to be aware of clubs' schedules outside of student nights and one participant even suggested that her favourite club is only open on Mondays for the student night. The routine that students develop out of their nightlife practices feeds into the *keying* about the social importance of consumption practices and the observation that it is specifically those routinised and established activities (such as regular shopping browses, fixed meetings in cafes or weekly nightlife routines) shared by several people in a friend group that make these practices socially more significant. While nightlife is established as an important facilitator of social relationships, a *keying* here showed that the discussion of student nights up to this point also establishes nightlife activities as markers of distinction through which students associate with each other and distinguish themselves from local populations. The latter is an out-group that none of the students were able to specify in more detail. Ultimately, students' time logic to their nightlife practices seems to indicate an agreed and collective rationality about time and constitutes a constructed social time that is quickly taken up by newcomers to the group without much critical reflection.

### Nightlife as Factors of In/Exclusion

Holton's research (2015a) has pointed out how students' first year in their university city is characterised by the usage of student-centric spaces and designated student nights and a rejection of these in later years. Also in this research it seemed that students' first year at university is characterised by a heavy engagement in nightlife and student nights. For instance, one student in his *social primary framework* explained how when he moved to Liverpool, clubs felt like a forbidden place that he has not been able to experience before and how in his first year he would go out up to six times a week (a frequency that was also reported by other students). Several participants described a similar experience from their first year for instance, explaining how there is a 'going out-ethic' with freshers that is facilitated through

living in halls. The off-campus accommodation of some participants did not just have bar facilities enabling pre-drink sessions before nights-out but the communal structures such as meals in a shared dining hall created informal gatherings of large amounts of students, enabling them to discuss their evening and night activities and convincing others to join:

We used to go out as like a hall so there'd be like however many people I knew in Carnatic and we would see them on nights-out all the time. So it was kind of like you go to dinner and people would be like 'Oh are you coming out tonight?' and you would be like 'I'm not really sure' and then they would be like 'Come!' and then 'Oh OK' and then I would go out, that kind of stuff. I think everyone just gets very like not wrapped up in it all but because everyone else is doing it and you don't wanna miss out too much. (Laura)

Several students mentioned a similar relationship between living in halls and an intensive engagement in nightlife and reported how even residential advisers encouraged them to go out as often as they could in order to meet and bond with people.

Generally in the *social primary frameworks*, students said that nightlife becomes an important factor in determining the level of 'successful' adjustment to student life. Several people described their fear of missing out from the student experience if they do not engage in these night-time activities. Continuously, they mentioned how those ideas were already fuelled prior to attending university by media representations, friends, relatives and parents. Also the importance of freshers' fairs was mentioned as a significant influence for first-years to get a sense of what it means to be a student and what kind of practices they are expected to engage in. Especially the participation in heavy drinking culture was mentioned as a component of this. Overall, engagement in nightlife and drinking was understood to be one of the most essential components of what students referred to as the student experience. In relation to this one student described a paradoxical shift in his thinking the year before he started attending university:

I always knew it [nightlife] was going to be there and you know when you are 12 or 13 you think 'oh it won't matter' like I go to university because I really enjoy the subject but as you get older and especially once you turn 18 it becomes 'OK this is what I'm gonna do' and 'It's gonna be fantastic and it's just part of it'. (George)

On the level of a *keying*, the perceived expectation to throw yourself into the city's nightlife coupled with fears over not being able to make friends and missing out is based on a preconceived idea about how student life should be and becomes a practice over which people have the feeling to fit in or not. In turn, it can cause problems for people who for various reasons cannot or do not want to take part in it. This was especially apparent amongst the two participants who lived with their parents and had to commute to Liverpool by train; they thus lacked the spontaneity and physical proximity to engage in nightlife with their peers. Both of them reported how they were concerned about missing out and put a lot of effort into the organisation of occasional nights-out with other students in order to feel part of a community. But also other students in more common residential arrangements described how in their first year they went along with the 'going out-ethic' because it was "perceived to be the best thing for you to do" (Tina) but described to struggle under the pressure especially when they came to the realisation to not enjoy drinking or clubs as much as other students seemed to do. One participant had an interesting account of this and explained how going out becomes a criterion of in/exclusion, whereas she felt that she was pressed into a role that she was not able to fulfil:

That's why I started getting most issues in my first year because I was like actually I don't wanna go out and then they would be like 'oh you are missing out' and that kind of thing and so it kind of had that you wouldn't be able to take part in the stories because you hadn't been part of it like you hadn't been there and done that. (Tina)

This sense of being overwhelmed by drinking and going out culture of fellow students was also reported by the three European students who took part in this research and almost unanimously described their first nightlife experiences in the city as a cultural shock. Two of them told me that they would still go out in order to spend time with their friends and housemates and to experience what they perceive to be 'authentic English student culture'. The third student described how she struggles to find people that would accompany her to gigs and jazz concerts rather than parties and as a consequence of this hardly engages in nightlife at all. Also a mature student who took part in the research told me how her age and financial situation are insurmountable barriers to joining on nights-out and how she perceived a sense of being excluded as



a consequence of this: “It’s [nightlife] a massive part of freshers’ culture definitely. And I think that it can be quite excluding if you are not involved”. She continued to explain how especially alcohol-induced activities seem to create bonds between people on the basis of which friendships and mutual anecdotes are formed.

While it was noticeable that all of the students who for different reasons were not able or willing to take part in nightlife as much as their peers felt a sense of being flawed and missing out, it was interesting to notice how the four Chinese students who took part in this study completely diverged from this observation. Two participants mentioned frequent visits to karaoke bars in a different part of the city further away from what is usually perceived to be the city centre. However, all four students explained that evening and night practices usually revolve around the house and the housemates rather than outside in the city. One student explained how for her staying at home in the evening is a natural choice (certainly also a social one) since in China most of the student accommodation imposes curfews on their residents. Ultimately however, all four of them revealed to be specifically concerned about their security in the city after dark with staying at home being the safer choice.<sup>38</sup>

The *keying* of diverging from the typification<sup>39</sup> of the student and as a consequence of this feeling a sense of self-doubt and a perception of being ostracised is an issue that has been widely discussed in the literature and is a re-emerging theme in this research that will also be picked up again in the next chapters. In talking to students about their going out practices in first year, it was surprising to notice that the typification of students as “young people [who] travel away from home to party for three years” (Chatterton and Hollands, 2004: 128) was supported by most participants. Based on the *social primary frameworks* of several students with regard

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<sup>38</sup> The month prior to the interviews saw two street shootings in Liverpool and all of the four Chinese students reported that these shootings are a conversation topic amongst their friends and increase their perception of feeling unsafe, making them prioritise the home environment after dark.

<sup>39</sup> As explained previously, a typification refers to the meanings that people attach to habituated activities that are shared amongst other actors in their social group. These meanings create categorical knowledge which constitutes an oversimplification of what it aims to describe. The typification of the student then refers to simplified and categorical ideas of what it means to be a student and how they are enacted.

to the central role of nightlife in their first year it was interesting to notice how all of them described a development over the subsequent years in which they started to perceive going out as repetitive, boring and expensive, a process they made sense of in the *social primary framework* as a development of maturation. One student described this distancing from a heavy engagement in nightlife in the following sentence: “Because everyone thinks it’s all about the nightlife but sometimes you just wanna watch a film” (Julia). Another summarised this general sentiment by saying that “as first year got on and the novelty of clubbing and stuff like that started to wear thin” (Tom) he realised how the reality of clubbing was expensive and exhausting and left him tired in the morning, making it difficult to attend classes and lectures.

Several students spoke about how in later years not just the frequency of their nights-out decreased but also how they started to reject the time logic inherent to student nights by going out on Fridays rather than other weekdays due to the realisation that this makes it easier for them to focus on their degree.<sup>40</sup> As a *keying*, this type of development comprises students’ adherence to preconceived ideas and typifications in relation to what it means to be students and how consumption in the city plays an important role in living up to this constructed reality. However, throughout the years students attempt to dissociate from this preconceived idea by adopting different consumption patterns which they perceive to be more mature, a pattern that will also become apparent in the discussion of their housing practices in the next chapter.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to note that despite the motivation to shift nightlife activities to the weekend several of these students still stuck to the distinction between nightlife for students and nightlife for other populations by going out on Fridays rather than Saturdays.

<sup>41</sup> Students make sense of their changing practices and spatial patterns in terms of referring to a development of maturation. However, in this thesis I will not pick up this interpretation of students’ actions based on the idea that the term maturation implies a judgment that some practices especially those in later years of study are more mature or grown-up than others.

## Nightlife Spaces and Time

This change in students' engagement with nightlife has spatial consequences since the shift away from student-centric clubs and bars also refers to a different movement through the urban environment. In the nightlife accounts of the participants it was especially two areas in Liverpool's city centre that were mentioned as an example of this development. Several students spoke about the importance of a specific square in Liverpool, Concert Square, and how this area would form the centre of their nightlife activities in first year due to the clustering of club chains putting on student nights. A number of students told me how for them this urban area and the practices within embody typifications of British drinking culture. Yet, despite that it was an important and meaningful place for them in their first year because this type of drinking behaviour was regarded as a significant component of the student experience. Several participants explained how for them this specific square is a symbol of student lifestyles, and a central space that forms part of the typification of the student. For instance, one student explained in his walking interview: "Concert Square like over here I would say it's mostly first year uni or just people who are kind of into the whole uni scene you know what I mean like 'uuuni' drinking games and all that stuff" (Toby).

It was interesting to note how the only participant who was on an Erasmus exchange in Liverpool had already adopted this perception of Concert Square as a site central to the typification of the student which he was eager to experience during his five-month stay. Also one of the students from Liverpool described how it is common local knowledge that students go to Concert Square and she explained how she would avoid this area specifically for this reason and her perception that what people refer to as students' typical nightlife practices is just uncivilised behaviour. Effectively in her description of Concert Square, she establishes the area and the practices that happen there as a "contrast class" to what she does and is looking for in night-time activities (Sacks, 1986). This was a general pattern in the interviews in which verbally many student participants were eager to distinguish themselves from Concert Square and everything it embodies for them by putting up contrast classes.

On the level of a *keying*, what becomes apparent in the discussion of Concert Square as a place of first year student culture is the potential for space to be moralised, that means the possibility of environments to be constructed as places for certain types of behaviour and specific types of people. As such, the moralisation of place contributes to the segregation of its crowds because when space is moralised it is also positioned and evaluated according to class, gender, age, etc. In this research, Concert Square was established as a place that has a specific moral code attached to it and this moral code leads to practices of association and distinction. While the segregated nature of student nightlife has been discussed in detail in this chapter it is interesting to note that also students in their second or third year of study distinguish themselves from Concert Square and its moral order. On another level, the example of Concert Square indicates that it is not just practices that serve as markers of distinction but people distinguish themselves from other groups through place, too.

In the *social primary framework*, the fact that for most participants Concert Square was not a nightlife option during later years of study was attributed to several reasons. Some people described how it took them the whole first year to actually discover the nightlife landscape of the city and find the places they liked and can associate with and how the environment of Concert Square was a means for them to discover their preferences and tastes as for instance, this student explained:

And it's quite weird because at the start you do go out more around Concert Square itself but now I feel like I don't really go around Concert Square. It's just that it's there in the middle and it represents that. [...] I don't think they have changed. I think it's what I'm looking for that has changed. (George)

Furthermore, the move away was explained by the perceptions that friendships have already been formed. Because of that, it is less necessary to go out and socialise with large amounts of random students. This development went in line with a reported increasing awareness for the characteristics of place and the type of consumption and practices it offers. Often students explained their move away from Concert Square as a night-time area in terms of maturation, arguing that they grew out of this type of student night and the audience present in this area. Usually this argument

was used by the students to introduce another night-time area which they perceived to be closer to their taste in later years at university. While this part of the city comprises several streets, commonly students referred to this area in the interviews as Seel Street, which is a road connecting a number of smaller side streets. It was noticeable how several students in probably quite contestable accounts made sense of this area in their *social primary frameworks* as classy and civilised, a contrast class to Concert Square. They were keen to emphasise how they identify with these attributes, as exemplified by this quote of a third year student: “They will all be in Concert Square which is alright but I think the places where I go out that’s just how I am, I’m just better suited to Seel Street rather than Concert Square” (Toby). Part of this impression of Seel Street as a more elegant area is due to the observation of some students that venues there attract people who adhere to a smarter dress code than the visitors of Concert Square. Other students have pointed out how they feel engaging in nightlife in this area enables them to get out of “the whole uni like mind frame” (Toby), giving the impression of a desired disconnection with the typification of the student.

One of the previous *keyings* discussed how students’ changing practices over time and the spaces in which this happens constitute a process of distancing from the typification of the student. It seems that in further years of study, the student experience becomes a device that students wish to distinguish themselves from. When looking at the places that are incorporated in this, it becomes apparent that there is also a spatial dimension to this development. The perceived ‘maturation’ that students described to go through is facilitated by different spatial choices including a different movement through the city. However, in the discussion of the movement of students from Concert Square to Seel Street it should be pointed out that while students introduced these places as two separate night-time areas, in practice they are not just in very close proximity or even adjacent to each other but in the city it is almost impossible to tell where one area stops and the other starts. This points to the assumption that in spatial terms a separation between the two is perhaps impossible to make, indicating that the differentiation between them is based on a moral code and the idea that they attract different types of audiences and different types of

practices. In other words, while they are geographically in extreme proximity to each other, socially they are understood in very different terms. On the level of a *keying*, while the described shift contains changing practices in time and space, it cannot be read in terms of an increasing segregation from fellow students. People still associate with student culture and visit clubs on days that are characteristic for students' nightlife time logic. The only difference is that these venues might be less overtly marketed at students (as for instance, student nights).

Overall this shift from Concert Square to Seel Street is indicative of a broader pattern in which the nightlife venues that students go to change every year. With regard to the switch from first year to second year, students reported a *social primary framework* describing a desire to dissociate from the new incoming students. I asked a participant why she does not go to the student nights anymore that characterised her first year and she replied in the following way:

When you go in there and there are so many people and it feels like not like you are older yeah like I guess because you are a year older you are like I've done that, I've been there. And sort of like oh my god fresher's and now we have sort of matured and go somewhere else. (Kate)

The spatial change relates to accounts of students who described a process of distancing themselves from the heavy drinking involved in student nights in first year and now prefer to have fewer drinks in different venues. While it is not possible to determine whether this change in consumption behaviour relates to an overall spending reduction or just a different distribution, several participants reported a sense of exhaustion with regard to numerous hangovers a week and how in later years they are willing to spend more money on drinks and places they enjoy as the frequency of their nights-out are going down. The discussion of how practices change over time and over space adds another *keying* to the exploration of the student experience and the typification of the student that it contains. Nightlife serves as a primary marker of distinction through which students distinguish themselves from all sorts of non-student populations in their practices, their social time as well as their spatial choices. However, the described development seems to indicate that students are not just externally but also internally a highly exclusive group in which each cohort tries to distinguish themselves from prior and subsequent cohorts.

## 6.5. The Centre of Consumption

While going out was the practice that most participants were able to discuss elaborately, in returning to the *strip* of consuming as a whole and looking at the bundle of practices it comprises (engaging in nightlife but also shopping or eating out) it was noticeable that all of these activities take place in an area that participants referred to as the city centre. Within the city centre, the walking interviews revealed a *social primary framework* in which most participants spatially divide this zone in terms of its function, designating a specific shopping area that usually also includes restaurants and a separate nightlife area. The shopping area mainly comprises the commercial development Liverpool One which several participants have argued to be the main city centre for them. When speaking about the nightlife area participants mainly referred to Concert Square and Seel Street close by. Each of these places is only relevant for certain types of practices and are thus frequented during different times of the day and in separate visits. Since the walking interviews took place during daytime, it was interesting to observe that while on a map the nightlife and shopping areas are adjacent to each other some participants severely struggled to take me to their nightlife places since spatially they have never connected these venues with the shopping area. The following quote exemplifies this:

So yeah I think that during the daytime I would never really spend time there during the day. So I kind of forget about it [...] I think for the first year I was here I kind of didn't even connect where it was. Embarrassing to hear, just because in my mind they were so separate. (Laura)

Two participants also attributed this to the use of taxis to and from clubs, making them unaware of the geographical location of a certain nightlife venue.

Because of the timing of the walking interviews all of the participants who took me around the shopping part of the city centre felt that it was a natural time of day to visit these places. In contrast to that, while many were keen to show me their favourite clubs and bars they seemed shocked to visit the nightlife area in daylight. Several participants made sense of this in their *social primary framework* by describing it as a rough place during the day and drew my attention to the graffiti which in their opinion indicates the deserted and dubious state of the area. When

approaching this part of town another student described: “Not during the day. Not a day time area. It’s a night-time area” (Carlo) and a different student described how at night the lights from the clubs and the amount of people present are a pleasant distraction from the actual place. For me it was surprising that this area is considered to be rough and dubious during the daytime because it has a large stock of Georgian houses which accommodate bars and clubs but also cafes and smaller shops and its narrow streets make it a comparatively calm area in terms of traffic.

One of the conversations during a walking interview facilitated my impression of this mono-usage of the nightlife area. When we enter Concert Square, the place in the city that several people characterised to be at the centre of first year drinking and going out culture, one student made the following observation: “I think it’s really random that they have got a Starbucks here because I don’t know who would go here apart from a night-out. Well, I know I wouldn’t” (Julia). The participants’ statement about the perceived odd location of a café franchise is actually indicative of a spatial unawareness and probably also a certain degree of ignorance towards other users and usages of this part of town. To explain this further, the perspective from which she has spotted the café shows the backside of the franchise branch on Concert Square which has its front going out to Bold Street. This road was discussed previously with regard to its offer of alternative shopping outlets, cafes, second hand stores, book shops and a large choice of mainly independent restaurants. Spatially, she is clearly not able to make this connection probably because Bold Street is rather part of her daytime practices and not used in connection with nightlife. The observation that she assumes that there would be no other people using Concert Square and its surroundings during the day who might find it useful to have the opportunity to buy a coffee, can again be a symptom of the social time logic of students and the *keying* referring to the spatial segregation from other city residents.

While few participants also mentioned visiting cultural facilities such as museums and galleries in the city centre, on the level of a *keying* it became apparent that for most people the city centre is entirely about consumption through shopping, eating out and nightlife and does not offer anything outside of these practices. The sentiment that the city centre is primarily about spending money was explicitly shared by a few



students for example, pointing out that there are hardly any places in the centre to sit for free or explaining that because of the consumption oriented nature of the area they hardly ever visit it; for instance, pointed out by this student: “I don’t really come during the day because to come to town during the day you need money to spend which I don’t really have” (Tom). As such, almost all of the participants recognised Liverpool’s city centre mainly as a place for consumption and depending on their willingness and ability to spend money used or ignored this area of the city. As will be shown in a subsequent chapter, few exceptions to this use of the city centre existed with only some participants using it as a place for exploration.

## 6.6. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the *strip* of consuming by exploring the three main practices that constitute it: shopping, visiting restaurants and cafes, and engaging in nightlife. Based on the way the students made sense of their practices in the *social primary frameworks*, several interpretations of their meaning structure, in the shape of *keyings* and *fabrications* were discussed. The frame analysis approach interprets how students make sense of their practices in order to illuminate how they construct the student experience. The discussion of students’ financial situation showed that the inequalities inherent to the HE financing system are more complex than previously thought of. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are certainly disadvantaged with regard to the overall debt they accrue through attending university. However, also students from wealthier families can struggle financially during this time since the small amount of financial support received through student loans is mainly supplemented through part-time work, rather than through parental support. On a more general level, students’ self-representation as being ‘poor’ was established here as a *fabrication* because their frequent engagement in consumption-related practices contradicts the notion of being needy or deprived. However, at the same time it is problematic to refer to them as a cash-rich group in the city since their willingness to spend large proportions of their income on certain leisure and consumption practices happens at the expense of spending more money on other aspects (such as housing or food).

A *keying* that developed out of the participants' discussion of practices such as shopping or visiting restaurants and cafes is that primarily they have a social function in terms of facilitating and maintaining social relationships. This finding also applies to the engagement in nightlife and the importance that participants placed on attending events that attract large amounts of fellow students. In looking for further justifications to explain their attendance of student only spaces and events, the participants brought forward economic reasons. However, the supposed cheapness of these events and venues was contradicted in other accounts by the same participants and was thus established as a *fabrication*. One of the main findings of this chapter then is the *keying* that students facilitate and maintain social relationships through consumption practices. However, while consumption is seen as major component of the student experience it is not made sense of in economic terms but in social ones. Furthermore, while it facilitates social relationships with fellow students it also constitutes a marker of distinction towards non-student populations. Students' nightlife practices follow a specific time logic and this was made sense of by the participant to create a desired separation from other residents of the city. Although the participants were not able to define more precisely who the non-student populations are, this still constituted a meaning structure that was quickly and readily adopted by new incoming students.

Another *keying* that developed out of this chapter is the propensity for nightlife practices to constitute a factor of in/exclusion. Excessive engagement in these activities is seen as part of a 'successful' immersion into the student experience, especially in first year. As a consequence, students who for whatever reason are not able or willing to engage in nightlife the same way feel a sense of missing out and not being able to live up to the student experience. Related to this is the typification of the student which contains categorical ideas of what students do and how this should be made sense of. The aspiration of students, especially in first year, to fit this typification, to enact it as thoroughly as possible and then to also judge fellow students on their commitment towards it constitutes another *keying* in this analysis. The student experience is thus an aspirational category through which students make sense of their own practices but also judge the efforts of others on.

The observation that students' practices change over time and over space and that they increasingly distance themselves from the typification of the student in later university years becomes especially apparent when exploring their nightlife practices. Concert Square was seen to embody student culture in the first university year. On the level of a *keying* this demonstrates that space is moralised, that means certain practices, meanings, and actors are associated with it. The moral codes that are attached to specific places trigger processes of distinction. Students thus do not just distinguish themselves from other people through their practices but also through the spaces in which these are enacted. Participants in their second and third year of study tried to distinguish themselves from the type of nightlife present in Concert Square, arguing that the Seel Street area in immediate proximity carries a different and more appealing moral code. These findings led to another *keying* which claimed that nightlife practices as well as its spaces do not just function as markers of distinction towards a perceived out-group but these practices and places are also used by students to distinguish themselves from earlier and later cohorts.

Consumption practices and the spaces in which they occur are therefore important aspects to gain membership to the student community. The vast majority of the practices discussed in this chapter take place in an area of the city that the participants refer to as the city centre. Students divide this area according to its functions and they establish temporal hierarchies associated with the different uses of several parts of the city centre. Despite the close proximity of the shopping and nightlife area they struggle to physically connect these environments since they are never frequented in the same visit. Especially the night-time area was established by the participants as an environment that is exclusively used during the night and the participants seemed to show little consideration that during the day this area might fulfil very different functions for other people. This can be assigned to the specific social time that students adhere to. Certain places are frequented only during specific times of the day (or the week) and disappear of students' mental urban map outside of these times.

Outside the topic of student housing, only a few scholars have connected students to wider consumption practices in their university city and often these accounts are

centred around urban nightlife (Chatterton, 1999, 2002, 2012; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002, 2004; Hubbard, 2014). Chatterton's (1999) observation that students' nightlife practices follow a particular spatial and temporal logic and act exclusionary on anyone who is not a student was also confirmed in my research. However, while other consumption practices of students in cities (e.g. eating out or shopping) do take place in the presence of other population groups, within the student body they have a similar effect. Consumption practices in general, not just nightlife, are always to some degree interpreted as providing access to a student community and as such consumption has an aspirational character. In the interviews, the participants made sense of their consumption practices in the city as an aspect of the student experience and seemed to almost naturally accept that this is part of their idea of what students do. However, the analysis in this chapter has shown that the student experience is effectively a term that disguises the consumerist essence of some the practices that it entails. For students, in making sense of a new life phase and in the quest to form new and strong social relationships, they mainly make sense of their consumption practices in social terms rather than identifying the financial strain that is put on them through these constructed ways of acting and being.

## CHAPTER 7

### Living in the City

In this research, I explore the social construction of the student experience, particularly the practices and sense-making processes of students and how these are enacted in the urban spaces of the university city. This chapter discusses students' housing choices with a particular emphasis on the ways in which they make sense of their residential situation and decisions. One of the motivations behind a more thorough investigation of how students make sense of their residential environments was based on the observation that in the literature the reasons why students deem certain urban areas as appropriate housing locations are little explored. However, the choice of a residential neighbourhood is subject to complex processes of sense-making, as is skilfully summarised by Jane Jacobs:

Even the most urbane citizen does care about the atmosphere of the street and district where he [sic] lives, no matter how much of choice he has of pursuits outside of it; and the common run of city people do depend greatly on their neighbourhoods for the kind of everyday lives they lead. (1961: 117)

In the interviews, it was noticeable that all of the students were keen to discuss their residential situation with me and it became apparent that housing choices are a key factor in identifying as a student and getting a sense of being part of a group. The analysis that is presented here addresses the following research question: Why do students make certain residential choices and how do their residential patterns influence their engagement with the city? This research question mainly informed the fieldwork process but in reflecting the interviews, the analysis presented here goes beyond this initial research interest and reflects the multiple meaningful ways in which housing decisions were discussed.

In a previous chapter, student housing was established as the largest research topic within the field of students in cities (e.g. Rugg et al., 2002; Smith, 2005; Allinson, 2006; Smith and Holt, 2007; Hubbard, 2009; Kenna, 2011; Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Holton and Riley, 2013, 2014; Smith and Hubbard, 2014; Smith et al. 2014). It is especially the process of studentification, referring to the large in-movement of

student populations to residential areas, brought about by the conversion of single-family terraced housing into HMO, that has been discussed extensively. It was also argued that while there is some leeway for City Councils to license and register student HMOs as well as regulate their establishment in heavily populated student areas, in practice this is rarely taken up (Smith, 2005, 2008; Allinson, 2006; Department of Communities and Local Government, 2008; Hubbard, 2008; Sage, Smith and Hubbard, 2012a, Smith, Sage and Balsdon, 2014; Viitanen and Weatherall, 2014).

While a mayoral recommendation supports the development of more PBSA in Liverpool's city centre in recognition of difficulties associated with studentification (Liverpool City Council, 2015), for the case of Liverpool I could not find any evidence that measures (e.g. Article 4 Directions) were used by the City Council to stop the conversion of single family terraced housing to HMO in residential areas (Liverpool City Council, no date, 2018a). At this point in time (February 2018) a draft local plan is under review and consultation that suggests a continued development of the student residential market in the city centre and close to the universities (Liverpool City Council, 2018b). While it is suggested that in some areas of Liverpool changes to the Use Classes Order should be considered in order to introduce that a conversion of a single-family dwelling to an HMO will require planning permission, at this point in time my impression is that no local policies are in place to reconsider or prevent the further development of student accommodation in areas of the city (Liverpool City Council, 2018b).

In 2016, Liverpool City Council stated that over 21,000 bed spaces for students are contained within PBSA or halls of residence all over the city (Liverpool City Council, 2018b). This means that about half of the student population lives in this type of development and presumably the largest share of the other half lives in HMO from private landlords.<sup>42</sup> Liverpool wards such as Kensington, Toxteth and Wavertree have

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<sup>42</sup> It was not possible to locate more detailed statistical information on where in the city students live, where they cluster and under which circumstances they live. It can be assumed that the vast majority of students either lives in PBSA or HMO but there will also be a smaller proportion of people who continue living with their parents or guardians, some who live outside and commute to the city and those who live with their partners and/or dependents.

over decades experienced the large influx of student populations. Previously, it was argued that scholars have noted that the tipping point when areas become unbalanced and are dominated by their student populations is difficult to predict and seems to incorporate other place-specific features (Hubbard, 2008 and 2009; Smith, 2008). The absence of any policy in Liverpool to restrict HMO formation coupled with a seemingly inactive HMO Lobby in the city might either be due to the idea that the previously described tipping point has not been reached or that these oppositions are not powerful enough to make themselves heard. While in this research I am interested in exploring how these areas of the city are experienced, it will focus exclusively on the student perspective of their residential environment and will thus not go deeper into potential community issues in Liverpool's studentified areas unless they were mentioned by the participants.

This chapter will therefore focus on the participants' housing choices to key into analyses of UK students' housing trajectories and the switch from university-managed accommodation to the private housing sector (Holton, 2014b; Smith and Hubbard, 2014) and studies looking at the distinctiveness of students' housing pathways (Christie et al., 2002; Rugg et al., 2004; Holton, 2015a). Special attention will be paid to the ways in which students make sense of their residential environment and in doing so this chapter will develop analyses of students' lived experiences in their accommodation (e.g. Holton and Riley, 2014; Holton, 2014b). In exploring why students make certain residential decisions, this chapter will focus on the *strip* of housing and how students make sense of the practices it entails in the so called *social primary framework*. It will then discuss broader interpretations of the students' discussion of their practices and sense-making by introducing *keyings* and *fabrications*. Throughout this chapter, quotes from the participants will be used mainly in order to exemplify an opinion or attitude that was common amongst several participants.

In describing how the participants make sense of each move and residential decision, I will focus on a spatial pattern that seems to imply a certain hierarchy of residential spaces as well as the attachment of a specific moral and social character to each living environment. In the interviews, it was noticeable that some residential areas were

more popular and common than others and several participants created similar meaning structures around their residency in these neighbourhoods. While students make sense of their moves one at a time, a broader spatial pattern emerged out of these conversation revealing a distinctive movement through specific residential spaces of the city. In this thesis, I will be referring to this movement and the specific neighbourhoods it entails as an ideal-typical student housing pathway. Max Weber developed the ideal-type as an analytical tool to explore how people construct their social reality. As a theoretical construct it depicts a “‘pure’ form of social action” stripped down to its core mechanisms and elements (Parkin, 1982: 27). Based on the assumption that social phenomena cannot be studied in their totality, Weber argued that the basic features of a social practice need to be emphasised and studied and in this sense, “ideal-types only approximate to social reality, they do not and cannot mirror it faithfully” (Parkin, 1982: 28). The ideal-typical student housing pathway thus describes a particular (idealised) sequence of residential choices in order to explore how students make sense of their residential decisions and housing environments. While also other types of residential decisions and neighbourhoods will be mentioned, the ideal-typical housing pathway discussed here focuses on elements and locations of student living that were the most common amongst the participants in this research. In summary, this ideal-typical housing pathway has a pattern in which students move from halls of residence, to the ‘Smithdown Road Area’, an example of a studentified neighbourhood in Liverpool, and potentially to city centre locations.

## 7.1. Halls of Residence as Taste Makers

The most common starting point of the ideal-typical housing pathway for the students who took part in this research was the choice of Carnatic and Greenbank Halls: university-managed and mainly catered halls of residence situated off campus, approximately five kilometres from the University of Liverpool and the city centre. While some people said that they considered the usually pricier option of on-campus halls because of their proximity to lecture theatres almost all of these students eventually decided to live in off-campus halls. In the *social primary framework* they positively evaluated this decision because of a perceived possibility to separate the



spheres of work and private life and the opportunities it offers to get to know a different and more suburban area of the city.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, because of the smaller flat size of on-campus accommodation (in terms of residents per flat) and because they are mainly self-catered, some students mentioned the impression that off-campus halls are the more sociable option in terms of the living environment which is shared by more people and with regard to the opportunity to meet even more first-year students during meal times in the dining hall. Probably also other factors such as the availability of communal outdoor spaces and the necessity to embark on shared bus journeys to reach the university and the city centre contribute to the impression of off-campus halls as the more sociable option. One participant was also a student helper on open days and in the following quote summarised the impression of the sociable character of off-campus halls and also described how he passes this impression on to prospective students during their visits:

A lot of people don't like the thought of living in [off-campus halls] Carnatic. They want to live in [on-campus halls] Vine Court because it's en suite and it is self-catered but I think people tend to have a more sociable time in Carnatic. (Max)

Halls have been conceptualised as spaces that are marketed to be the best environment for the first-year students (Holton, 2014b) and a similar attitude could be detected in this research. In my conversations with the students it seemed that the idea of living in halls was so obvious to them that they had not even considered other residential arrangements for their first year at university. When asked why he decided to move into halls, one student gave a reply which stands exemplary for the reactions of most of the participants:

Yeah I mean I had never really thought about not living in halls. I just thought that halls would be the done thing for first year. I thought I was gonna live there and then you know you go your own way afterwards. (George)

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<sup>43</sup> In 2014 the University of Liverpool opened new, on-campus student accommodation called Crown Place (a large-scale development, in parts going up to eight floors) mainly for undergraduate students. Although two other types of university-managed halls were available on campus before that, Crown place strongly increased the availability of accommodation in this location. Almost all of the participants of this research joined the university before the construction of Crown Place was completed and thus did not have the option to choose it as their first-year accommodation.

Although some students pointed out that the transition from leaving the parental home and moving into halls felt like a large step towards independence, viewed in the backdrop of the ideal-typical student pathway, on the level of a *keying* halls can only be conceptualised as semi-independent living. They constitute a protected (often also gated) environment in which in most cases food is still prepared for the students and the cleaning at least of communal areas is done. In tune with the literature (e.g. Wilcox et al., 2005; Andersson et al., 2012), the most important attraction factor to halls reported by the participants in the *social primary framework* were the opportunities they offer in terms of socialising and the potential for building up new support networks and friendships. This factor turned out to be more important than the actual physical state and layout of the accommodation which several students criticised for the lack of communal spaces in the flats and the outdated design of the buildings, making it difficult for them to feel at home.

Place is inherently social (Massey, 1992; Gieryn, 2000), no matter how badly it is designed but it also profoundly influences the type of social behaviour that can be carried out there (Jones, 2011). This became apparent with the participants because although several of them characterised the architecture of off-campus halls as a deterrence factor in choosing them, this perception was made up for by the idea that they are the more sociable option. The idea of living in an environment with people in similar ages and life circumstances was explained to be very important for the fresh students. The participants spoke about anxiousness and worrying with regard to not being able to make friends. This fear made them favour environments like halls in which they are surrounded by people like them and are in some ways forced to socialise. The idea that moving into halls is an inevitable step because of the perceived opportunities that off-campus halls offer in terms of socialising and building social relationships seem to be the most important factor in making this residential decision. This finding will constitute another *keying* in this research.

Although socialising opportunities were the most important decision factor they also had the tendency to create severe problems for some students. In the literature, halls have been conceptualised as homogenous environments favouring some types of behaviour and interactions over others (Holton and Riley, 2014; Holton, 2014b),

mainly those that aspire to the student experience for instance, in reference to expectations about people's engagement in nightlife, discussed in the previous chapter. Because of that, they can be experienced as exclusionary places for people who for whatever reason are not able or willing to engage in certain practices. The peer pressure to be a certain type of student was reported to be the main reason for not enjoying their first year at university. Several students described how their first year ended up in disappointment and stress because they struggled to get along with the people they lived with, as this student pointed out: "When people go into halls they go into a block and the people in their block that's their mates and then they all go to houses with them. Whereas it wasn't like that for me" (Toby).

Usually these struggles were based on conflicting *social primary frameworks* with regard to ideas about what a first year student should be like and do. These expectation typically related to students' drinking and partying practices, as this student explained: "They were that group of people who were like really let's go out, let's get drunk, I don't really care about work and like I care about work to the extent that I wanted to do well" (Tina). What was striking about the accounts of all of the participants who reported difficulties in living up to the ideas contained in the typification of the student is that they experienced these clashes as an individual problem. They made sense of this conflict that played out in the residential environment of halls in terms of being different to everyone else and sometimes also interpreted this as a personal flaw. However, in reference to all of the interviews that I have had with students, it was striking to notice that a lot of the participants reported similar clashes and conflicts of interest in describing their experience of living in halls of residence. This might indicate that while enacting the typification of the student is challenging and troublesome for many students, contradicting its logic by questioning the practices it entails marks out someone as the other and has an exclusionary effect.

On the level of a *keying*, these problems referred to incompatible ideas about what it means to be a student but also conflicting levels of maturity, as this student explained who despite being good friends with her housemates struggled to behave in ways that were expected:

It was horrible, well I thought that it was very dirty, a lot of ... very immature like the people were lovely but it was very clear that they hadn't lived away from home before and they were just like partying like crazy. (Stina)

Previously, I have described how the choice of halls of residence for students' first year at university has been portrayed by the participants as an inevitable choice. Considering some of the dominant assumptions about student life that are present in these spaces, it can be argued that in halls very early on students are introduced to the idea of living in an environment with people like them that is physically and socially closed off from other communities. In halls, students become integrated into a group that brings strong pressures of conformity with it; presumably they take these dominant norms into other residential areas.

The connection between studentification and gentrification has been discussed previously with the result that while in many ways they are two very different processes, students can be conceptualised as apprentice gentrifiers in the sense that ideal-typical ways of living provide them with a taste pattern that might become amplified in later life stages (Smith and Holt, 2007). In this research the idea of living with people in similar life circumstance was mentioned as the most important factor to choose halls over other types of accommodation. In living in this type of housing, students are exposed to a residential environment that is characterised by the segregation from other people based on characteristics such as age, class, income, education, etc. The next section moves to another social space of student living and will describe this amplification of a residential taste in exploring what it means to live in a studentified neighbourhood.

## 7.2. Different Neighbourhood, Same Expectations

Following the ideal-typical student housing pathway, the most common residential choice after leaving halls was moving to the main studentified neighbourhood of Liverpool, that means an area with a large stock of terraced housing that was converted from single-family dwellings to HMO (Smith, 2005).<sup>44</sup> Students refer to this

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<sup>44</sup> While other neighbourhoods of Liverpool (for example, areas in the Kensington ward) might have also seen a process of studentification, choosing them as a living location was less popular amongst

neighbourhood as ‘Smithdown Road’ which is actually only the name of a long road (approximately 2.5 km in length) with numerous smaller side streets coming off it. While it was common for students to say that they live ‘on Smithdown Road’, in effect what most of them meant is to be living in close proximity to it or on the side streets just off it. Geographically, the road is situated almost in between the off-campus halls of residence and the university, approximately three and a half kilometres away from Liverpool’s city centre.

Stevenson (2003: 70) has argued that the naming of places and areas usually implies that a certain cultural meaning is attached to it, an assumption that certainly holds for the Smithdown Road area and its contribution to the student experience. For the students, naming ‘Smithdown Road’ as a residential location is bound up with ideas about being part of a student community and being the right type of student. Similar to the decision to live in halls, people described their move to the Smithdown Road area as if it was an inevitable step, using expressions like “I think people just gravitate there once they have left halls” (Maria), “For undergraduates that’s definitely where everyone moves” (Stina), “It seems to be that everyone goes there” (Toby) or “Smithdown was like the automatic reaction” (Laura).<sup>45</sup> A recurring theme in the *social primary framework* was also the idea to go with the crowd and make a residential decision that seemed the most common amongst the students. In the interviews, several participants expressed that their choice of a residential area was due to their perception that a lot of other students are also searching in this neighbourhood and the desire to not make a decision that could be perceived as being different. For instance, one student used the following expression to explain why the Smithdown Road area seemed to be the only viable option after leaving halls: “We decided that everyone was living in Smithdown Road. We didn’t really wanna rock the boat and risk anything going wrong in Kensington” (George).

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my participants, which is why I will focus on the Smithdown Road area in the description of the ideal-typical housing pathway.

<sup>45</sup> While the majority of students who moved to the Smithdown Road area would do so after leaving halls, some participants who have lived in this neighbourhood only moved there in their third year at university.



**Figure 7.1.** Images of the participants' HMO in the Smithdown Road area in their autophotography projects.

However, beyond the idea of the Smithdown Road area as the inevitable choice for second year living, students did mention several factors in the *social primary framework* that influenced their choice of this neighbourhood. Numerous participants described how during their first year, there was a lot of pressure to make a decision about second years' residential situation as early as possible and how it became a source of stress. For example, one student pointed out:

Oh yeah it's terrifying because you move [into halls] in September and then people are signing up for houses by the end of November. [...] There was just that fear because nobody really knows what's going on, how many houses there

are and where you are gonna live and who you are gonna live with. Everyone makes it worse for everyone else. (George)

Students described how they aimed to sign the tenancy contract before Christmas, so only three months into their first year, and emphasised the social nature of this pressure. Because the decision had to be made so soon the participants tended to move in with their flatmates from halls and opted for the Smithdown Road area because various people, such as residential advisers from halls, friends further into their degree, lecturers at university but even parents and friends from home, all of them seemed to recommend but also expect students to live in a studentified neighbourhood. Other reasons that were mentioned in order to explain the choice of this area were the public transport connection to and from the university, the price of the accommodation, the accessibility of amenities (such as supermarkets, cafes, bars, take-aways) and the size of available houses making it possible for large groups of students to live together. Interestingly, several participants mentioned the proximity of the studentified neighbourhood to their halls of residence, an environment they were used to, as a reason to opt for this area. Smith (2005) has proposed that studentified neighbourhoods are situated in close proximity to the university and while good and speedy transport links to the university were certainly desirable, in my research it seemed that also the distance to halls is a deciding factor in students' residential decisions after leaving them.

In speaking to the participants about Smithdown Road, it became noticeable that almost everyone, even those students who had never lived in this neighbourhood, referred to it as the main student area of Liverpool. Even the only exchange student who took part in this research already adopted the typification of this neighbourhood as a student area.<sup>46</sup> Although he was slightly deterred by the seemingly bad state of the houses there, he mentioned that if he was in Liverpool for more than a few months he would look for housing in the Smithdown Road area because he perceives that this is where students are supposed to live. Other participants who had not lived

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<sup>46</sup> The typification of the student area refers to attaching meanings to a neighbourhood but in doing so creating a simplified version of what is going on in a space and who the space is for. In this case interpreting an area to be for students only.

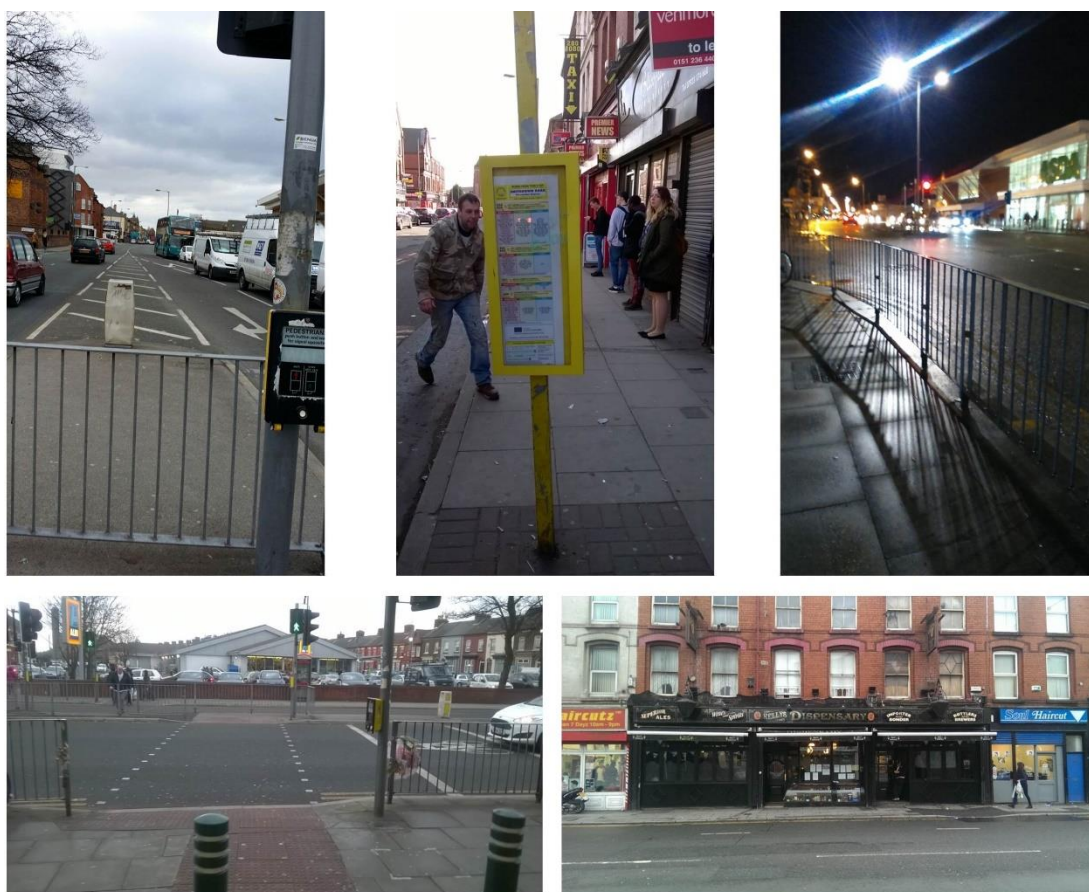


Figure 7.2. Images of Smithdown Road in participants' autophotography projects.

in this neighbourhood often described a sense of regret about missing out on a community they should have been part of.

Above several reasons to choose this neighbourhood in students' *social primary frameworks* were mentioned but quite similarly to the decision to live in halls, on the level of a *keying* it was noticeable that it is again mainly the social factor, so the idea to live in an environment with many other students, that turned out to be the most important reason for students to move to the Smithdown Road area. Students typified the neighbourhood as a communal place where the large majority of their current but potentially also future friends and course mates live. They positively related to the perception of living in an environment where a lot of other students live and are around. Previously in reference to the example of nightlife the importance of space in living out the student experience has been emphasised. Students do not just distinguish themselves from other urban populations in their practices but also with regard to the areas in which these take place. The Smithdown



Road area and its meaning for student living is another example for the importance of spatial decision in the creation of the student experience.

Most of the studentification literature highlights the conflict potential between large student populations vis-à-vis established residents and families, in a small area, with different expectations and requirements to their immediate living environment (e.g. Smith, 2005, 2008; Smith and Holt, 2007; Sage et al., 2012). While a few students acknowledged the existence of people in different life circumstances in the immediate neighbourhood, all of them described to stand in no interaction with them as this quote exemplifies: “All in all really I haven’t spoken to anyone like any of my neighbours or anything like that but I think that’s pretty common” (Toby). With most students the conversation about the Smithdown Road area never even led to the topic of non-student populations in this neighbourhood. The few students who did bring it up showed seemingly quite low levels of empathy or interest in the lives of these residents and tended to make sense of this position in the *social primary framework* by describing a perceived hegemony over the place arguing that it is primarily a student area.

Besides the decision to live in halls, Smith and Hubbard (2014) have conceptualised the move from halls into privately rented student housing as key events in students residential pathways. When looking at the decision-making factors for this move it becomes noticeable that, as many other groups, students like to be similar to each other and in that desire tend to copy other students behaviour believing it to be the appropriate thing to do. In Bourdieu’s terms their actions could be described through the concept of ‘logic of association’ (Moore, 2014) and in showing these patterns students are following a pathway that could be described to be a typification, that means it is a habituated, shared but also simplified version of students’ housing trajectories. The most important reason for students to move to the studentified neighbourhood of Liverpool is the social factor, so the idea to keep on living in an environment with many other students in the immediate neighbourhood. Building on this, I would argue that studentified neighbourhoods are to some degree an extension of halls of residence. They have an important function in managing the transition from halls to self-catered accommodation as for instance, this student

explained: “It’s quite good because even though we’ve moved out of halls we are all still quite close together and you can still see each other as much as you want” (Julia). This means that students still have their friends living close by and they still settle in an area with many other people who are similar to them. In doing so they are still part of an environment which they at least perceive to be homogenous and which *de facto* continues to support certain norms and dominant assumptions about student life. The only difference to halls is that they move further towards more independent ways of living since they tend to have more chores around the house and more educational commitments in their second and third year of university.

In other words, while private sector accommodation makes students live in more self-sufficient ways, students take the ‘hall character’ into the studentified neighbourhood. This offers another explanation for the existence of conflict potentials between other residents and students and relates to research in which established residents have described their increasingly studentified neighbourhood as a “dormitory town” (Sage et al., 2012a: 1068). Viewed from this perspective, it is not surprising to note that the participants in this research hardly seem to show concerns for other populations present in this environment. They move to the studentified area expecting it to be like halls of residence where they were hardly in touch with non-student populations in their residential space. Consequently, they did not learn to negotiate the living environment with other users and their needs.

### 7.3. City Centre Living – Leaving the Student Community

What I refer to as an ideal-typical housing pathway which focuses on students’ spatial movement in the city, stopped in the Smithdown Road area for most students in my research; either they would move there in their third year or those who lived in the Smithdown Road area after leaving halls usually reported to move to a different house within the same neighbourhood for their final year. While several participants spoke positively about the advantages of city centre living, especially the proximity to the university, considering the strong increase of mainly purpose-built student accommodation in the city centre of Liverpool, it was surprising that only two

participants lived in the city centre during some of their time as students. However, almost all of the participants in their interviews discussed the option of city centre living which turned out to be the least popular residential location for the participants in Liverpool.

The default justification in the *social primary framework* for almost all of the participants was to characterise city centre living as too expensive and beyond the budget of a student. Usually these assumptions were expressed although the participants had not actually looked into the prices of housing in this area. The participants further justified this reasoning by mentioning another aspect to the typification of the student, the idea that they are supposed to live in rough and cheap areas of the city. Many participants explained this in reference to the suitability of the Smithdown Road area as for instance, this student pointed out: “It’s a bit grotty, a bit rough but in a way that’s like how student living should be so it serves its purpose quite well I think” (Max). With most of the new developments in central locations in Liverpool advertising themselves as luxury student accommodation, on the level of a *keying* it was noticeable that the participants rejected this idea. Rather than buying



Figure 7.3. An image of the participant’s residential building in the city centre in her autophotography project.

into the concept of luxury central accommodation they rejected it because it is not seen as a component of the typification they aspire to. To put it in other words, their construction of the student experience does not entail luxury living and the urban areas in which this type of accommodation is offered.<sup>47</sup>

To discuss this *keying* further, the construction of the student experience is embedded in urban areas. In making sense of their activities, in the *social primary frameworks* students assign reasons as to why certain areas of the city are not part of the experience but these meaning structures can be identified as a *fabrication* (that means they are incongruent with other meaning structures and practices that the participants reported). The majority of the students in this research ruled out the prospect of living in the city centre based on the idea of not being able to afford it. However, they did so without searching for evidence that this is actually the case. They also did not put up more sophisticated calculations in which the price of a bus pass and taxi fares to and from the city centre is subtracted from the monthly rent they would pay in this area. The argument that the participants did not seem to actually compare or investigate residential markets also works the other way. Thinking along the lines of a cheap and rough area as an appropriate living location for students, it is easy to mark out other areas in Liverpool which fulfil similar criteria as the Smithdown Road area (e.g. proximity to university and the city centre, availability of amenities, 'cheap' rents, etc.). This means that the rejection of the city centre and the acceptance of the Smithdown Road area as an appropriate residential location is in fact not an economic but a cultural decision. The Smithdown Road area is typified to be something the city centre is not and the main difference is that the Smithdown Road area is constructed to be a social and communal student neighbourhood. Statements like the following were very common amongst the

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<sup>47</sup> Potentially the word 'yet' should be added to the end of this sentence. Increasingly new PBSA is built in central locations and around campus and Smith (2005) has argued that it has the potential to show new geographical patterns to student living. When going back to the starting point of the ideal-typical student housing pathway, the importance of first year housing to get a sense of what it means to be a student was discussed. In this research on-campus accommodation has been argued to have a more individual character and due to its central location limits students' encounters with other areas of the city. Whether the different geographical location and social character of on-campus halls but also the heavy advertisement of this type of housing has the potential to change the perception of 'appropriate' ways of living cannot be determined here.

participants and point towards knowledge that is taken for granted and not checked, a typification: “I wouldn’t want to live in the city centre. Just because not many students do, like, I like having everyone just in a walking distance and things” (Kate) or another student who explained: “I think you should live in an area where there are other students too and you are surrounded by students because that’s what student life is I think” (Carlo). The same student also referred to the city centre as “not the right area for students”.

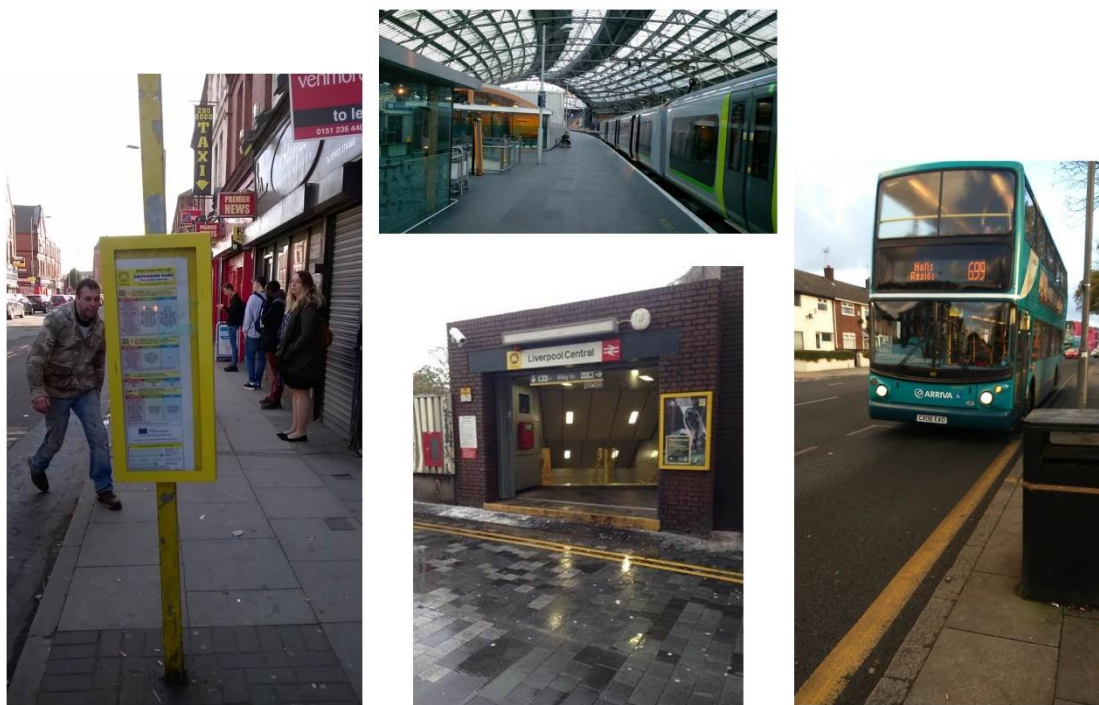
Several people denoted the Smithdown Road area to be their centre and focus point of the city arguing that people who do not live there either miss out or spend a lot of time and money traveling back and forth. The following quote exemplifies this: “Like if you lived in the city centre it would just be effort because you miss out on all that stuff or you wouldn’t and you’d then have to think about getting taxis to and from” (George). This was also emphasised by another student who for her second year chose to live in the city centre assuming that it would give her ready access to the student experience. However, she realised that she had to some degree excluded herself from the student community through this move: “Being in town weirdly you were more out of the way than if you were in Smithdown. In trying to be in the centre you actually got further away from where you proper centre would have been” (Tina).

In their rejection of the city centre as a suitable residential location, several participants in the *social primary framework* also referred to the idea that this area is a mature location to live in. One of the students who has lived in the city centre for her final year described that her move was motivated by the desire to get away from where the students are and the impression that the city centre is a place where people choose to live on their own. She thus referred to a specific vision of sociality in the city centre and further explained this separation in terms of the notion of outgrowing house shares and an increasing desire for independence by arguing: “I know other people who have lived in town, they have done the Smithdown thing for a year and then decided they don’t wanna do it any longer and moved into town” (Laura). In turn this means that the *keying* of a city centre as an inappropriate residential location because of its perceived lack of a communal student character also includes the notion that the city centre is a mature place to live that facilitates

residential individuality.<sup>48</sup> Moving to the city centre is associated with distinction and separating yourself from the group.

## 7.4. Spatial Movements and Housing Pathways

In discussing students' decision-making processes with regard to their places of residence, in the interviews, the theme of mobility and movement came up as another important factor to an appropriate residential location. The necessity of mobility on a day to day basis was a prominent subject in the participants' discussion of their engagement with their place of study and also featured prominently in their photovoice project. The most popular residential choices for first and second year (off-campus halls of residence and the Smithdown Road area) are in some distance to the university and the city centre. Because of that, they necessitate students to



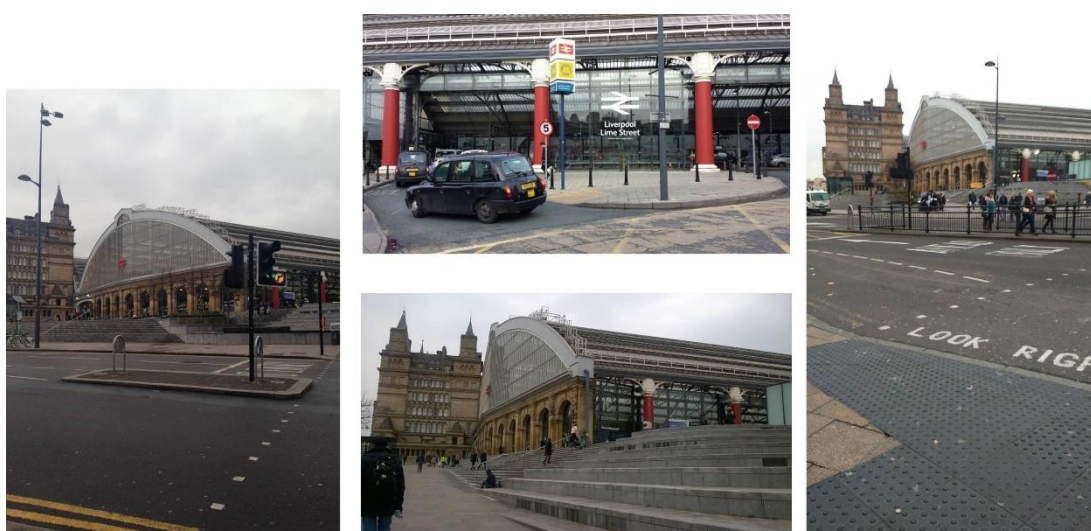
**Figure 7.4.** Images of public transport in participants' autophotography projects.

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<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to note that perhaps already the housing market in the city centre facilitates this idea. Whereas in the Smithdown Road area students tend to group up and rent a whole house together, dealing with the room allocation themselves, city centre accommodation tends to be rented out on a room basis. In that sense perhaps the different rental market facilitates a degree of individuality that is seen to go against the typification of the student and with it common ideas of how student living should be.

think about various ways of moving around the city and to consider the associated cost of it. With this in mind, several means of moving through the city, by train, on foot, by running, on bike, and by bus were mentioned in the interviews and discussed as important components of the participants' lives. This was justified not just in reference to their dependence on this type of mobility to move around but also with regard to the sometimes substantial amounts of time they spent travelling to and from urban areas.<sup>49</sup> The availability of certain transport means (such as specific bus lines) that connect the students' residential areas with the university and the city centre on the same route had an influence on residential decisions and enabled a specific type of movement in the city.

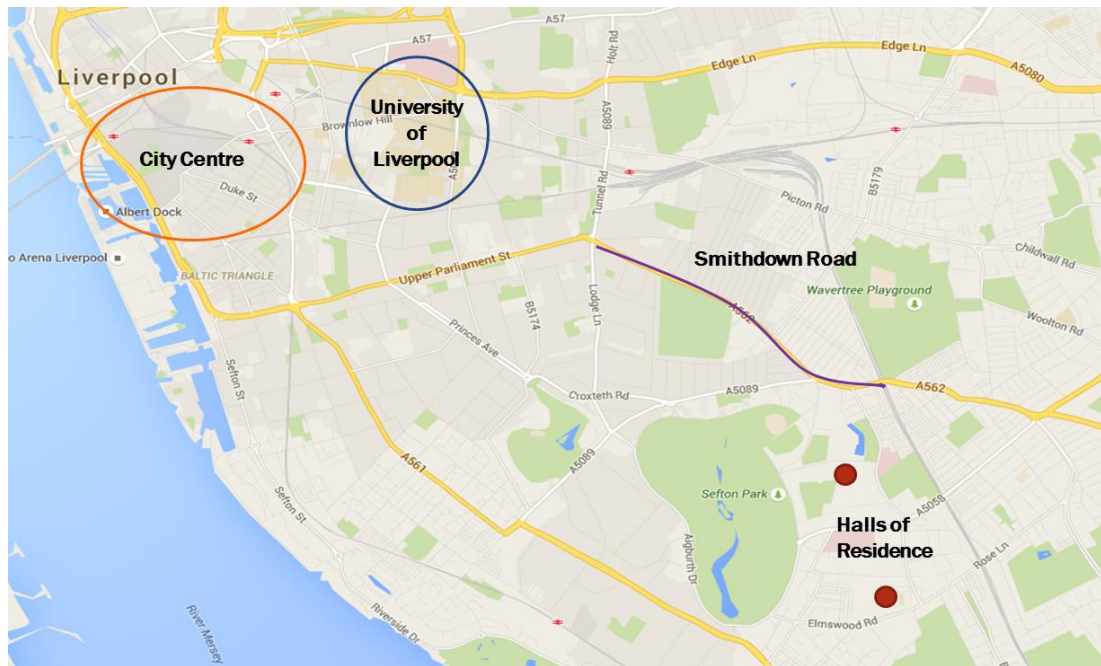
When it comes to undergraduate students, movement through the city has a several temporal layers. Students' move through the city on a day to day basis and create a distinctive pathway connecting studentified neighbourhoods with universities and the city centre. On a different temporal level, the ideal-typical housing pathway described above also reveals a specific movement pattern. Neighbourhoods become meaningful for different communities over time and urban areas are bound up with different models of sociality that students are aware of. Generally it seemed that moving to a different place every year was common amongst the students and in the



**Figure 7.5. Images of Liverpool Lime Street station in participants' autophotography projects.**

<sup>49</sup> Speaking of mobility, also Liverpool's main train station Lime Street was included into several autophotography projects and walking interviews and was described to be an important place in terms of mobility but especially also a symbol for being able to reconnect with friends and family from home and in other locations outside of Liverpool.





**Figure 7.6. A simplified map showing the most common residential spaces in the city as mentioned by the participants and the ideal-typical student housing pathway. (Map ©Google)**

*social primary frameworks* different reasons were assigned to this practice. Some participants described how their perception of what it means to be a student constitutes a contrast to the settled life of post-university adults, including more frequent residential changes. Other participants discussed the influence of halls of residence rented out for a year only on the creation of annually changing housing patterns. However, mostly students made sense of changing houses every year in terms of seeking out an improvement of their residential situation and they interpreted each move as a step up the property ladder. Taking this further, another *keying* is the interpretation that students' movement decisions are a route towards more independence, moving from catered to self-catered accommodation with decreasing numbers of housemates and an increasing desire to separate themselves from their peers in this process.

In spatial terms the ideal-typical housing pathway shows a movement that increasingly gets closer to the city centre. Furthermore, each move is connected to a certain moralisation of the new environments including expectations on the types of people and kinds of practices that are present there. Commonly students choose off-campus halls of residence when they enter university and move to the Smithdown Road area in their second year. While for most people the housing pathway stopped



there, it was noticeable that although only two participants actually lived in the city centre at some point during their housing pathway, several participants in their last year of study considered the city centre as an attractive residential location due to its proximity to the university and the facilities it offers. This constitutes another *keying* in that spatially students move closer to the city centre as they get older. Considering the common perception of the city centre as a mature and individual place to live, increasingly they separate themselves from their peers during the residential pathway contributing to an impression that the more urban the living situation the less collective.

## 7.5. Housing Choices as Indicators of In/Exclusion

Most of what has been described so far follows the ideal-typical student pathway and the distinct spatial pattern it creates in the city. While the majority of the students followed this pattern at least partly, several participants diverged from it and some of them in ways that are worth discussing because it indicates the importance of housing choices over perceptions of being a 'proper student'. In the previous section, city centre living and students' opinions about this type of residential location has been discussed. While the University of Liverpool is in close proximity to the city centre (or some would even argue it is a part of it), a residential location in or around campus was described as distinctive from city centre living and mainly taken up by the international students that took part in this research. These four Chinese students lived in PBSA in close proximity to the university and in the *social primary framework* praised the gated character of this type of accommodation making them feel safe in the home environment. Furthermore, they described how this type of housing accommodates a large proportion of Chinese students, something they perceived to be a positive trait, as this student explained: "[B]ecause I still share kitchen and bathroom with my roommate I think it's more convenient that you can live with Chinese person because you have similar lifestyle" (Luna). Scholars have argued that new on-campus student accommodation developments which are often gated, high-rise and in close proximity to the city centre are mainly targeting international students (Collins, 2010; Kenna, 2011). In doing so they have been observed to



**Figure 7.7. Images of PBSA on and around the campus of the University of Liverpool in participants' autophotography projects.**

contribute to the segregation of different types of students based on language and culture (Fincher and Shaw, 2011). The Chinese students in this research confirmed this aspect of segregation to their accommodation but also pointed out that for them this was a desired way of living.

Building on the idea that international students prefer residential locations close to campus, my impression is that the University of Liverpool also tries to accommodate all of the exchange students in this area. This refers to those students from abroad who visit for an academic year or less and decided to not rent in the private sector. This was criticised by one exchange student who in the *social primary framework* characterised it as a form of segregation enforced by the university. He argued the following:

You should ask the University of Liverpool because they create a ghetto. They put all the internationals in that place and the English people in the other accommodation. If I were to choose like who should go where I would mix people. (Carlo)

Another full-time European student who because of a lack of financial resources did not choose halls for her first year ended up living in a cold and mouldy terraced house far off from the university. She described how for her second year the choice of PBSA in proximity to campus was the safest option regarding certain quality standards such as running water and heating. However, she also explained that because she had not lived in halls she had missed out on the opportunity to find people to share a house with. What is common to all of these accounts is the *keying* that living on or around

campus constitutes a form of segregation from other, especially UK, students but the participants seemed to interpret this differently as either a positive or a negative aspect to their accommodation.

Another group of students who clearly distinguished themselves from the ideal-typical student housing pathway were those from Liverpool or the surrounding area who decided to keep on living in their parental home while attending university. In the literature a substantial amount of attention was given to this type of student, especially in Holdsworth's research (2006, 2009) where she studied their experiences of attending university in their home town. She pointed out that they struggle to fit into the student community and have the perception to lead two separate lives, the one of a student and the one of a local. This also included a strict physical and social separation that exists between these two spheres (Holdsworth, 2009). Three participants from the Liverpool area took part in this research and two of them opted for a home stay while attending university. Interestingly, the third student was urged by his parents to move into halls despite the proximity of the family home, due to concerns about him not being able to achieve the full student experience and as a consequence of this to have problems with fitting in. The notion of missing out and struggling to join the student community was part of the *social primary framework* and reported to be the biggest fear by the two home students who both described to feel the necessity to make a special effort to attend certain events and not seclude themselves. They mentioned the common assumption that home students close themselves off and that this type of othering was perceived to mainly be based on their different residential situation. One of them referred to the notion of the 'proper student' arguing that just because of her living situation she would not be characterised as a genuine student:

Like I have heard that term before 'proper students', like you know living in halls and all stuff like that. And I'm obviously not a proper student because I didn't do the whole living out experience. (Sandra)

This paradoxical perception in which the housing situation seems to be a more significant deterrent of what it means to be a student than factors such as the actual university attendance was picked up several times in the interview. For instance, the

student quoted above also described that most of her course mates unknowingly assumed that she lives in the Smithdown Road area and how for her this was a compliment because it supposedly indicates the degree to which she is integrated in the student community.

The *social primary framework* of these students from Liverpool contained that the decision to stay at home during the studies is perceived to be the less mature choice as this student from Liverpool who left the parental home pointed out:

I think you don't get the same experience because obviously you are not as independent from your parents and you have to worry about money so it's more of a life lesson you learn when you move out for university. (Marc)

There is certainly a logic to the assumption that an increasing physical distance from the parental home helps young adults to become more independent but it is also problematic to assume that this way of life is superior in terms of achieving the goal of independence. In this research, the assumption that moving out from home is necessary to be a more independent person is characterised as a *fabrication* since the encounter with the students who live in their family home contradicted this sense-making. It struck me in the interviews with the two home students that they came across as some of the most mature and reflected students I had interviewed. Possibly one of the main reasons for this is that the decision to keep on living in the parental home is an active one and in having this character, it strongly differs from students' rationales to move into halls described early which are often presented as the inevitable and only option that was considered. One of the home students described how he likes the comfort of living at home in a rural area and how regular contact to his friends from school is very important to him. The other home student described how the main reason for her to stay at home was her financial situation but also how she realised that moving out is not the only pathway towards independence:

Like I feel like I didn't need that experience to make me grow up. Like I've been independent for a very long time like I don't need to move out of my mum and dad's house to make me grow up. I didn't feel like I needed that so like I think for some people they do need it because they are not independent and they rely on their parents the whole time. For me it was just a financial strain. (Sandra)

Ultimately, similarly to what Holdsworth (2006, 2009) has argued, both students described how by living at home they have to juggle various types of expectations. Some of these are brought about by the new life such as feeling pressure to do well in university and to mingle with new people. Other expectations existed prior to them attending university, such as commitments to friends and family from home, that still persist. Considering these complex sense-making processes, it is questionable whether the choice of living at home while being a full-time university student could really be conceptualised as the less independent or less mature option but rather just constitutes a different pathway towards the same goal.

What becomes especially apparent when hearing the accounts of students who decided to choose different residential arrangements is the *keying* that housing has become a major criterion of in/exclusion and an important factor in the construction of the student experience. This is especially apparent in comparison to the ideal-typical housing pathway that was described in detail in this chapter and students' assumptions about the pursuit of this pathway as a natural or inevitable decision. However, only when looking at the experiences of people who strongly differed from this does it become apparent that not following the ideal-typical pathway constitutes a feeling of being excluded from the student community, only with limited opportunities available to make up for this perceived flaw.

## 7.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the various ways in which students make sense of their residential practices and environments in exploring the *strip* of living. Halls are a starting point for the ideal-typical student housing pathway and they have an important function in facilitating a residential taste that is based on segregation. Halls of residence are so embedded in the participants' construction of the student experience that most of them did not even consider another type of accommodation for their first year. At the same time, halls are physically, socially, and culturally closed off from their surrounding environments. They are in the city but in many ways shut off from it. As a *keying* it was established that the main reason for students to go to

halls is the idea that they would live in an environment with a large amount of people who are similar to them; an environment that forces them to socialise and establish new social relationships. Following this argumentation, this chapter demonstrates the importance of social factors in making residential choices and how the decision to live in these environments creates and maintains pressure to resemble the typification of a student.

The connection between student living and residential segregation also became apparent after students left halls, when they settled in a studentified neighbourhood of Liverpool. The Smithdown Road area is the main student area of the city according to the participants and the most important decision factor in moving to this neighbourhood was the perception that the majority of students are living in this location. Although studentified neighbourhoods symbolise a switch from university-managed accommodation to the private sector, as a *keying* it was argued that students assign them a similar communal character. Studentified neighbourhoods are thus made sense of in a similar way to how halls of residence were understood and experienced. As such, studentified neighbourhoods are an extension to halls, in the sense that they are an environment perceived to be homogenous by the students and which continues to facilitate dominant and simplified ideas of what it means to be a student. Coming from halls, students have not learned to negotiate their residential environment with the needs and requirements of other populations. However, they do apply the same expectations and sense-making mechanisms to this area, as they did before.

The discussion of the city centre as a possible residential location for students showed that this neighbourhood is the least popular amongst the participants. This is mainly because the area goes against common ideas of how student housing should be like. City centre living is assumed to be expensive and luxurious, rather than the accepted accommodation norm of living in areas that are rough and cheap. Noteworthy here was the *keying* that areas of the city are included in the notion of the student experience. In other words, some areas are seen to offer more possibility in students' aspiration to achieve the 'full experience'. While students explained the acceptance and rejection of potential residential areas mainly in economic terms it also became

apparent that these judgments are not just based on finances *per se* but also include a cultural dimension. The main difference between the city centre and the Smithdown Road area is that the former is not seen as a communal living location but linked to ideas of mature and individual ways of living. The studentified area was interpreted to be the social centre for students, despite the fact that much of student life (especially other consumption practices) takes place outside of this neighbourhood.

The undesirability of city centre accommodation in my research came as a surprise to me considering the amount of student tower blocks that are going up in this area of Liverpool and the proclamation by the city council to foster this type of development (Liverpool City Council, 2015). The perception that geographical patterns of student accommodation in Liverpool are changing is further supported by subjective accounts of journalists, students, friends, landlords and many more, who claim that increasingly the houses in the Smithdown Road area are staying empty and becoming more difficult to rent out. Throughout this PhD research, I was trying to make sense of this contradiction, that is my findings versus my own observations of my environment, and I wondered whether the cohort of people that I interviewed was just at the brink of a different development. However, in relation to the findings of this chapter it became clear to me that the primary factor in making a residential decision was the perception of the presence of a large student community in certain neighbourhoods. The city centre was constructed as an area that does not have this character but perhaps this perception is changing. Generally, the more student accommodation there is in the city centre the higher the potential for a large student population to settle down there. Thus, just the existence of many rooms for students might give the impression of a communal area. Furthermore, it seems that student accommodation developers (through advertising the existence of gyms, TV rooms, cinemas, table tennis, air hockey in the buildings) have caught onto the idea of not just providing a room but also providing a certain vision (or illusion) of sociality and community. In other words, if patterns of student living are changing towards the city centre, this could also be made sense of within the findings presented in this chapter,

that means that residential decisions are still made sense of in reference to social factors.<sup>50</sup>

Based on the three residential areas discussed in this chapter (off-campus halls, Smithdown Road area, city centre) a *keying* in the shape of a spatial pattern was put forward. Students move from halls to a studentified neighbourhood, taking the hall character with them but moving towards more independent ways of living. As the participants were getting older and moving into further university years, the idea of city centre living locations (although hardly realised) becomes more attractive. The main reason for this spatial pattern is a social one because in moving closer to the city centre they increasingly separate themselves from their peers. Therefore, students' housing patterns re-introduce the observation that moral codes are assigned to different residential areas. In following the described ideal-typical pathway each housing area of the city is associated with a particular phase in a student's life. Essentially these areas and neighbourhoods are connected to changing ideas of how to behave as students and different requirements to the immediate residential environment that come with this development.

The final *keying* in this chapter described the importance of the ideal-typical housing pathway in identifying as a student and having a sense of fitting in. This was exemplified on the accounts of students who made other residential choices and as a consequence of this felt a sense of being outside of the community. Especially the accounts of students who chose to stay in the parental home while attending university brought a paradox to light in which a residential choice is more important in determining what kind of student people are than other types of practices or commitments. Overall this feeds into the discussion of the multiple processes of distinction that are at work in student culture. Through their housing practices students do not just distinguish themselves from other non-student populations but

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<sup>50</sup> Changing geographical patterns of student accommodation towards the city centre are problematic for various populations in the city, not the least students because all of the new accommodation is expensively priced and is increasingly replacing more affordable living options.



‘the other’ is also the student who is not able or willing to follow the ideal-typical student residential pathway.

The literature on studentification was identified before as the largest body of research on the topic of students in cities and much of this chapter has built on the insights of scholars who have studied how HMO conversions and PBSA impact and change neighbourhoods (for instance, in Smith, 2005; Smith and Holt, 2007; Hubbard, 2008; Hubbard, 2009; Kenna, 2011; Holton and Riley, 2013; Smith et al., 2014; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). However, there is still a gap in understanding why students make certain residential decisions and how neighbourhoods come to be perceived as appropriate or inappropriate places of residence. As such, this chapter has added to the literature that has studied the lived experiences of students’ in their residential environment (Andersson et al., 2012; Holton, 2014b; Holton and Riley, 2014) and has argued that although there is a strong desire for segregation from non-student populations; the place of residence is a key aspect in achieving membership to the student community. As such residential decisions are major factors in student’s aspirations to achieve the full student experience and to be perceived as the right type of student. Living in a certain way and in certain place is thus another consumption practice that is bound with the student experience but that is made sense of in social terms. Places thus become associated with consumption practices and ultimately the endeavour to realise a specific and exclusive vision of sociality.

## CHAPTER 8

### Studying (in) the City

The previous chapters have identified the importance of consumption practices and housing decisions as factors of in/exclusion into the student community and as significant components for the participants of what they consider to be the student experience. In discussing the *strips* of consuming and living it was argued that when entering university the participants aspire to a typification of a student. Typifications are the meanings attached to habituated activities which are shared and agreed on amongst a certain social group. Berger and Luckmann (1991) have argued that these meanings constitute categorical knowledge and are an oversimplification of what they aim to describe. In doing so a typification constitutes a narrowing of choice of how to act within a certain category. With this in mind, the typification of a student is a generalisation and simplification of what a student is and does. The social construction of the student experience contains the typification of the student while also adding a spatial dimension based on the idea that students' practices and sense-making do not exist in a vacuum. They take place in a specific spatial context which is shaped by students but also shapes the practices that are enacted within. The previous chapters have argued that the practices of consuming and living in a certain way play a part in the construction of the student experience. Place has an important function within this enactment since it enables students to distinguish themselves from other parts of a city's population and in doing so reinforce the typification.

Although the only reason why the participants are even able to enact this typification of a student is due to their enrolment status as full-time undergraduate students at the University of Liverpool, the *strip* of studying at university and the practices it comprises has been conspicuously absent from the discussion of the student experience presented here. In the literature review it was argued that universities are increasingly run like business models emphasising economic aspects to the



**Figure 8.1.** Screenshot from the website of the University of Liverpool in the section for prospective students.

delivery of education (e.g. Chatterton, 2010; Ibrahim, 2011). This trend has been discussed further in reference to the notion of the “privatisation of social risk” (Antonucci, 2016), connected to the conditions of income contingent repayment loans (McGettigan, 2013). The implications of this shift in the tuition fee system contribute towards the increasing commodification of student life in and outside of university turning students into consumers (e.g. Smith and Holt, 2007). The cities the universities are based in form an important backdrop to this process of commodification for instance, with university branding materials referencing and advertising various aspects to the possible life of prospective students in the city as can be seen in Figure 8.1. and 8.2.<sup>51</sup>

This chapter discusses a complex triangular relationship involving students, the university and the city they are based in, in reference to the final research questions: How do students’ develop a sense of place in the university city? What role does the university have therein? In talking to the participants about the significance of university in their lives as students and their practices on campus of the University of

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<sup>51</sup> The website of the University of Liverpool dedicates large sections to the introduction and description of the city and the potential places and activities prospective students could engaging in. These sections are available under the following link:  
[www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/welcome-to-liverpool/insiders-guide-to-liverpool/](http://www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/welcome-to-liverpool/insiders-guide-to-liverpool/)

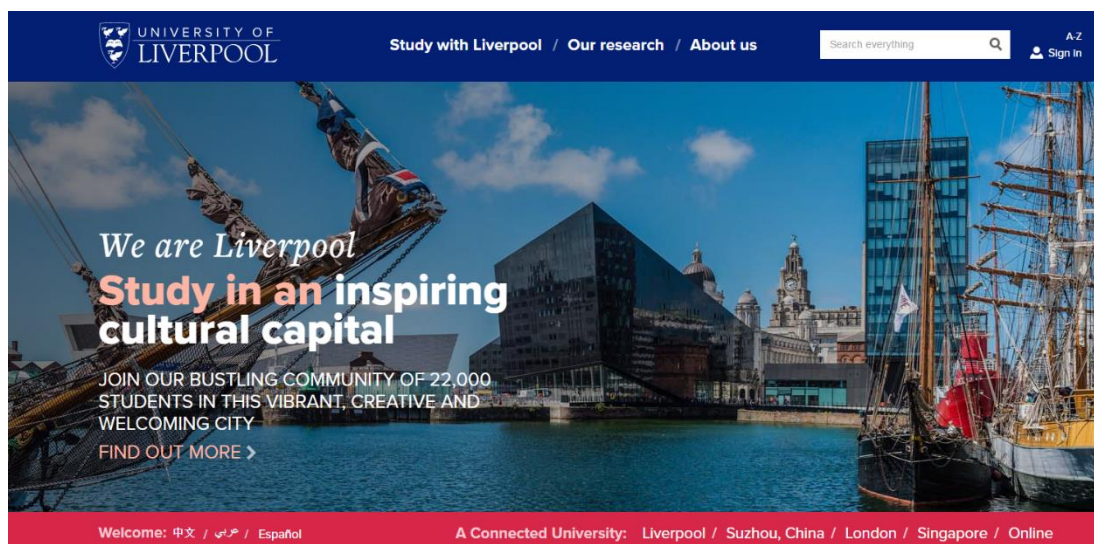


Figure 8.2. Screenshot from the home page of the University of Liverpool.

Liverpool it became apparent that each year at university is entangled with a changing relationship to the city. These different ways of engaging with the city are strongly influenced by participants' perceptions of the required workload on their programme of study vis-à-vis their ambition (but sometimes also lack of it) to achieve certain results. As will be argued later, especially formative in this is students' first year at university which at the University of Liverpool only has a marginal contribution to students' overall degree classification, in the sense that their grades are not counted into their average but they are required to achieve a pass mark of at least 40%. In doing so this regulation enables the formation of the idea that studying is about much more than just attending university. This idea forms the basis of the construction of the student experience and opens up different spaces and activities in the city for students.

The frame analysis approach used to interpret the data looks at *strips*, which are practices that students engage in bundled under one term, and how they make sense of these practices and render them meaningful in the so called *social primary framework*. These meanings are then interpreted to be part of a *keying*, that means a broader pattern that could be detected across the data, or a *fabrication* in the sense that the way students make sense of certain activities stands in contrast to other accounts of their lived experiences. While the previous chapters looked at two *strips* in particular, consuming and living, the complicated relationship between the

university and the city requires an approach to this chapter in which two *strips* are discussed.

I will start out by looking at the *strip* of studying, involving the various ways in which students make sense of their university attendance and engagement with their degree programmes in the *social primary framework*. As argued previously, students' participation in education-related activities as well as their progression through university years together with an associated psychological development strongly influences their relationship to the city. Because of this interconnectedness, in this chapter I will also look at the *strip* of exploring, mainly in relation to the various ways in which students engage with their university city and how this changes or is influenced by their participation in HE. The discussion of students' relationship to their city of residence continues an analysis of their consumption practices. While in a previous chapter consumption only in terms of an economic transaction was discussed, this chapter will explore how students consume spaces and objects in the city in visual and symbolic ways (e.g. Harvey, 1992; Zukin, 1995; Crang, 1997; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Stevenson, 2003; Urry, 2005; Miles, 2007).

## 8.1. The Increasing Significance of University

Perhaps it seems odd to discuss students' engagement in their programme of study and their university attendance in the final analysis chapter of a thesis which is attempting to make sense of the notion of the student experience. However, my impression from the interviews was that in speaking to the participants about their lives as students the practice of studying, another *strip* in the frame analysis approach, was not as relevant or meaningful as it might be intuitively assumed. In talking to the participants' about their lives as students in Liverpool, the university and various practices related to it were in most cases only a topic of conversation because I had specifically asked about it. Some participants included photos of the campus in their photovoice project, most commonly either a picture of the library or a picture of a departmental building, but the conversation about these photos usually turned out to be relatively short and dry. When they were asked, the participants



**Figure 8.3.** Images of the campus of the University of Liverpool in participants' autophotography projects.

pointed out that the university and their programme of study are very important for them. However, perhaps it is doubtful that they would have responded any differently to this question, considering that most participants seemed aware of the fact that their student status is the main source of access to a student experience. Therefore a negative answer to this question could potentially render their status and presence in Liverpool as meaningless.

In the *social primary framework*, that means in making sense of their university participation, most indicated that their studies became more and more significant with subsequent years but also mentioned that especially in their first year other aspects around their lives in the city were perceived to be much more important and



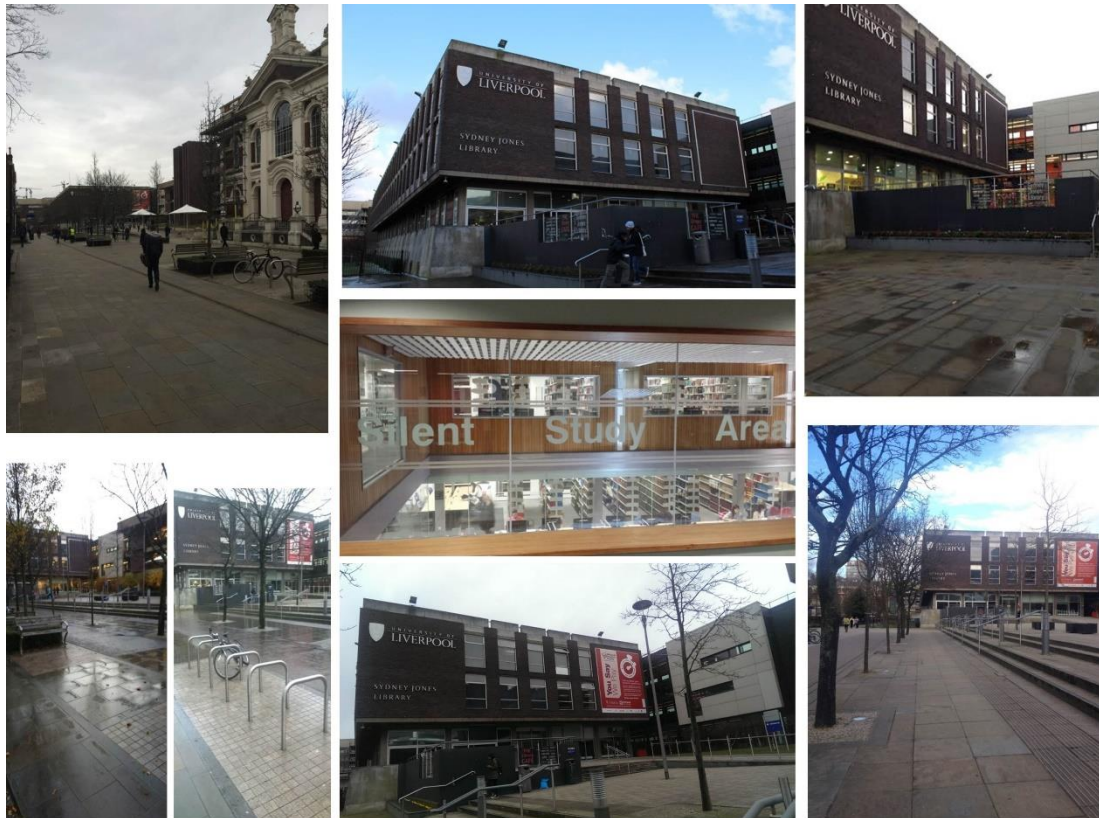


Figure 8.4. Images of the Sidney Jones library in participants' autophotography projects.

time-consuming than studying or attending university lectures.<sup>52</sup> This perception was mainly related to the fact that students' first year at the University of Liverpool only has a marginal contribution to their final grade and that merely passing, that means achieving an average grade that is equal to or higher than 40%, is sufficient. In making sense of this, a *social primary framework* including the perception that university is supposed to take a backseat in first year was cited by most participants and quotes like the following were very common:

[E]veryone has got that thing 'first year doesn't count'. Usually you need to get a pass and stuff so in first year study is like an afterthought. It's more like the social life and making friends and establish who you are. (Sandra)

Because of the perception that doing the bare minimum to at least pass the first year is common if not even expected, the participants described how their attention

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<sup>52</sup> This observation was very different for the four Chinese students who took part in this research. My perception with all of them was that they take their studies very seriously and see them of primary importance for their lives in the city. This focus on doing well in university influenced their engagement with the city in the sense that they described that most of their practices either revolve around campus or their accommodation.



**Figure 8.5. Images of departmental buildings in participants' autophotography projects.**

shifted to other activities, such as those that concern the *strip* of consuming. Students' participation in Liverpool's nightlife and especially frequent engagement in student nights in their first year were discussed in a previous chapter. Several participants mentioned the supposedly common phrase of "First year is beer year" and made sense of this statement in reference to the perceived insignificance of their participation in the first year of their programme of study. Participants explained that first year is about socialising with their peers and fun in contrast to the seriousness of any type of '9 to 5 job' and explained that nightlife participation becomes a focal point. The quote of this students stands exemplary for the opinions of several participants: "No, it's just your regular first year stuff, you know going out all of the time, you know doing what you need to do to pass and then after that you kind of do what you want" (Toby).

From a broader perspective it could be argued that this constitutes a paradox in which first year students pay tuition fees of £9,000 in an expectation to neglect their studies and instead engage in practices in the city that cost them even more money. However, almost all of the participants defended the marginal contribution of their first year at university in the *social primary framework* in reference to three main



reasons. Some participants mentioned that university students come from very diverse private and educational backgrounds and that first year is about bringing everyone on the same level and making sure that they have a similar knowledge foundation, as for instance, pointed out by this student:

Because everyone comes from such different backgrounds and past experiences it might be unfair to not have that period where you just go ok we're just gonna teach everyone the same things and just make sure that everyone is on the same level. (George)

Another argument in favour of the marginal contribution of first year brought forward by the participants was the idea that it is supposed to constitute a break from heavy study periods during A-Levels. Some participants pointed out that they perceived their final year in high school as more difficult than their first year at university, such as this student: "Oh I've been working so hard and I just kind of wanted a year where I could... I wanted to pass my exam but it didn't count and I could kind of chill for a bit" (Tina). This sense of a perceived deservingness of a break was not just explained retrospectively with regard to A-Levels but also forward-looking in anticipation of their entry into the labour market and a lack of longer breaks during the build-up of a career. The final reason, that was also the most common amongst the participants, was the impression that entering university constitutes a new life phase in which most young adults are confronted with completely different ways of living. Participants argued that students require a whole year to "find their feet" (Anna, Max), that means to get used to a new city, establish new social circles and learn to manage a new type of freedom.

Only some participants were in favour of first year having a more significant contribution to their overall grade, referring to the current arrangement as effectively rendering the first university year as meaningless, at least in academic terms. Even students who reported to have been working hard during their first year and who perceived a sense of exclusion from the student community as a result of that, argued in favour of the current arrangement. However, the students also pointed out that the marginal contribution of first year is problematic in various ways. They described how it made them struggled with the transition from first to second year and the drastic increase in responsibilities and pressure to succeed. The current arrangement

which leads many students in their first year to focus on practices outside of university does not equip them, they argued, with the necessary skills and mind-set to do well in their studies. A few participants picked up on this aspect referring to the switch from first year to second year as a “transition period of actually realising you got to do stuff” (Tina). In the frame analysis approach, students’ defence of the marginal contribution of first year will be treated as a *fabrication*. A *fabrication* is a tool that highlights contradictions in the accounts of students and their sense-making. The defence of the comparatively low significance of first year in terms of its influence on the grade average is characterised here as a *fabrication* in the sense that it contradicts other accounts by the same participants in which they emphasised the problematic character of this arrangement.

While all of them spoke very fondly of the large amount of time they had in first year to spend with friends on practices not related to university, it was also quite common to positively evaluate the increase in responsibilities when entering the second year of study. Several participants spoke about the idea that attending university is about personal growth and characterised having responsibilities as an important part of that. Some argued that because the grades obtained in second-year fully count into students’ degree classification they felt to have more of a purpose in life in contrast to first year, as for instance, this student pointed out: “I need to have some sort of responsibility. I need to be tied down sometimes because you can’t really like live in a world where everything is given to you. You couldn’t live your entire life like freshers.” (Tom). The process in which students gain a growing sense of ownership over their degree connected to increasing amounts of time spent working on it, was often referred to by the participants as a process of ‘maturation’ in which they learn to be adults. This is a development that in their *social primary framework* also accounted for changing consumption and housing patterns in the previous chapters. As I argued previously, in this research I did not adopt the interpretation that changing practices over time and space constitute a more mature way of acting and sense-making. As a result, changing practices over time and space are not made sense of with regard to the notion of ‘maturation’. However, it is interesting to note how changing cultural and spatial practices within the years of study are interpreted by

undergraduate students as a maturation, almost as if adulthood is the final stage and the overall goal of student life.

The marginal contribution of students' first year is problematic because many participants interpret it to mean that studying and university achievements are only of secondary concern in the first year of study. Because of that first year is perceived to not give students a realistic idea of what studying and university attendance is about and in doing so can create struggles for students once they enter their second year of study. Furthermore, the marginal contribution of students' first year at university gives them the opportunity to aspire to the student experience through consumption practices. In putting up fresher's fairs and giving students the option to fill their first year at university with various non-degree related activities, universities inspire students to adopt a fun-seeking lifestyle lived out through commercial spaces and practices. In this sense, they even encourage commercial institutions to come in and fill the void created by a lacking focus on academic achievements.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, the consequence of this type of commodification of student lives is the reproduction of inequalities since anyone who is not able to engage in practices that are considered to be part of the student experience will feel a sense of exclusion from the student community.<sup>54</sup> This feeling of exclusion was also reported by participants who took their studies in first year very seriously and dedicated a lot of time to them but described a sense of self-segregation from student culture through this engagement with their programme of study.

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<sup>53</sup> I had several discussions with my supervisors about the assumption that in first year there is something like an 'academic void' because from the perspective of a lecturer, students have just as many commitments and responsibilities to their degree in their first year and are offered a lot of opportunities to engage with their programme of study. Considering this, the void that I describe is not constituted by a lack of academic content but a lack of emphasis on assessment by the university. In this research, it turned out to be the main reason for students to not take the first year as seriously as the other years of study.

<sup>54</sup> Various examples of the ways in which students felt ostracised from the student community were mentioned in the previous chapters either with regard to their housing situation or with regard to their ability and willingness to engage in some types of consumption.

## 8.2. Choosing a University City

Perceptions of the growing significance of university in subsequent years and increasing amounts of time spent on degree-related practices influence students' relationship to the city. Most of the changing spatial patterns of students in their university city have been discussed in relation to the *strips* of consuming and housing in the previous chapter. Generally, I noticed that students make sense of their changing relationship to the city through increasing levels of participation in degree-related activities and vice versa. Although participants have argued that they get to know the city better with each year, as will be argued later, most of this still only constitutes a very partial engagement with the university city. In listening to the participants' accounts, it almost seems as if different places in the city have year tags on them, being either a first-year, second-year or third-year space<sup>55</sup> and most students struggled and even failed to identify a place that stayed with them for all of their student years.<sup>56</sup> Different spatial patterns throughout the years were often explained with reference to a changing taste as well as with regard to achieving a desired segregation from younger students. This finding relates back to the previous chapter in which it was argued that student culture is highly dependent on processes of distinction not just to external groups but even within the group of students, markers of distinction are constructed in part to create distance to other cohorts. However, all of this has to be seen within the university context in which moving on to a further year of study does not just require different time commitments but also it gives students a different position in a supposed hierarchy and the perceived need to distinguish themselves from younger students as for instance, explained by this participant:

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<sup>55</sup> Holton and Riley (2014) made a similar observation with regard to students' annually changing spatial patterns.

<sup>56</sup> In the interviews it was difficult for students to be able to identify places in the city that stayed with them throughout the duration of their degree. Most participants would mention green spaces as a constant throughout their lives. Most commonly they named Sefton Park, a large park in close proximity to the halls of residence and the Smithdown Road area. While some students included pictures of green spaces into their autophotography project (Figure 8.6.) most of them explained that due to the season (the interviews were conducted in winter) they did not think about including a park photo.



**Figure 8.6. Images of parks and green spaces in participants' autophotography projects.**

I think as we got older we kind of felt a bit like people that were coming in were younger and younger and we feel not out of place maybe but just a bit bored of the same old thing and you do the same thing like every Friday for three years and then you get a bit bored of it so you just try and do something different really. (Laura)

This process of distinction takes place in urban space, reflecting just one example of the entangled relationship between students' university participation and their engagement with the city.

Participants' anticipation of first years' marginal contribution to their overall grade and an associated freedom to participate in certain types of events and activities in the city seemed to have a strong influence on their choice of university<sup>57</sup>. In choosing an HE institution some participants mentioned the standing of the University of Liverpool as a Russell Group university and a certain prestige emulating from this, as for instance, this student:

That's the best: Russell Group, red brick, good reputation, been there for a long long time, a lot of research facilities, worth a lot of money, good lecturers, just if

<sup>57</sup> Using the expression 'choice of university' is problematic in the sense that this terminology might conceal a complicated process of making an application decision in which they consider to which degree their grades allow them to apply to a certain university and what their chances are of being accepted there. In this research all of the participants pointed out to have been accepted at more than one university or for more than one degree programme at the same university. In speaking about the practice of 'choosing a university' I thus refer to a choice out of an already limited pool of options.

you're gonna go to university in Liverpool you go to Liverpool uni. So that's again I don't settle for anything less, I don't settle for second best. If you're gonna do something do it right and so it was Liverpool. (Anna)

The participants who did refer to the association of the University of Liverpool with the Russell Group seemed to derive a sense of pride and self-value from being accepted at such an institution, like this student: "This is what I'm doing like a really good degree in this location in a Russell Group university and it makes me smile. It makes me feel like I have achieved a lot" (Tom). My impression was that participants understood the Russell Group to be a quality label and I noticed that their description of the university resembled the type of language that can be found in promotional material.

While the status of a university and the availability of desired study programmes were presented to be important factors in choosing an HE institution, it became apparent in the interviews that another aspect was at least of equal importance to the students. In describing their choice of the University of Liverpool, the participants were expressive about not just choosing an HE institution but also choosing the city the university is situated in, as for instance, this quote demonstrates:

I figured that Liverpool was a good uni but also it was a very good city [...] I didn't wanna go somewhere you know in the middle of nowhere like Loughborough. So the cultural side of it was part of why I picked it. (George)

Several of them pointed out that going to a university that is situated within a medium-sized city was an important criterion for them. Sometimes these statements were contrasted in reference to London as being too overwhelming and expensive but also in reference to campus universities outside of cities or in rural settings as being too secluded. Some students based their judgment of Liverpool as a suitable student city on visits that they made prior to accepting their offer, usually on open days. Many participants went to visit Liverpool before accepting the university offer and made sense of these visit in the *social primary framework* by reporting a positive first impression of the university and the city and the unspecified perception that it was the right place for them, communicated through expressions like these: "[I]t just felt right, that was the only way I could put it" (Max), "I kind of got a good feel about

this place like it would be a good place for me to be” (Tina) or this lengthier quote referring to a similar sentiment:

I was just like walking around uni and just thinking like just seeing myself there. [...] It was really strange because that was the first time it ever happened to me like walking around somewhere and it just suits me. (Toby).

A more general pattern, a *keying*, that develops out of this is that in choosing a university, students also believed to be choosing a specific way of life. In other words, when students imagine their life in the university city they do not just imagine the educational side of it but they picture a whole lifestyle that comes with it. This finding was put in a nutshell in the quote of this student: “[W]e are not just here as students but we have come to the city to experience it and live it” (Alicia). As argued previously, this vision of a certain way of life in the city is influenced already prior to attending university by various representations of the student experience in the media and accounts of friends and relatives (Chatterton, 1999). Another crucial factor in this type of imagination is a vision of a specific type of sociality and an associated belonging to a community, although this expectation to have a specific kind of life in the city together with certain people created all sorts of problems for the participants. It was interesting that almost all of the participants described an inconsistency between a previously imagined social life and the actual social reality they experienced but for different reasons. Most commonly, participants either referred to a sense of disappointment of not being close to their housemates or they mentioned an unfulfilled expectation in which their course mates would play an important part in their overall social life. As already argued previously, in explaining their entry into university, many reported a *social primary framework* containing a sense of fear of not being able to connect with others and as a consequence of this also described a readiness to drop out of university as a whole if this fear would have become a reality.

In terms of a *keying*, this means that participants have various expectations and visions of their life as students and in choosing a university, students are aware of making a spatial decision that can impact the fulfilment of these expectations. In this

research, the geography of the university turned out to be an important factor for participants in choosing an HE institution because the city is seen as a central component in realising a certain vision of student life. This vision is dominated by expectations of high degrees of sociality and being part of a community or in other words, students' visions of their lives in a university city are highly social and bound up with ideas and expectations of what will be done but especially also that this will be done in the company of other students. In all of this, the urban environment is seen as an important arena to allow these visions and expectations of sociality to play out in the first place.

### 8.3. A 'Student Gaze'

So far this chapter has discussed the *strip* of studying in exploring how students make sense of their participation in university related activities. While the reputation and perceived prestige of the university is an important decision factor, the spatial environment in which the university is situated in has been conceptualised as another main determinant in choosing an HE institution. The notion of the student experience as the impression that attending university is about much more than just educational achievements is the basis on which students' develop certain visions of what student life might be like and based on these they evaluate and choose their potential place of study. With these expectations in mind, students enter university and make sense of what it means to be a student not just in relation to their degree and university participation but also in relation to the city they live in. At the University of Liverpool, the different years of study have an uneven contribution to students' overall degree classification and it is especially the marginal contribution of students' first year that gives them the scope to make sense of what it means to be a student outside of university, a process that is social and spatial. Different university years are entangled with a changing relationship to the city and students' expectations of a certain type of sociality within the student community impact the way they engage with the city. Therefore, the discussion of the significance of students' involvement in their degree has to be connected to their practices in the city because of a mutually influencing



relationship between university participation, the year of study and the ways of engaging with the urban environment.

The previous chapters have argued that when entering university students aspire to a typification of a student and in deciding where to go, what to do and what to consume considerations about the practices of a perceived student majority are central. According to Berger and Luckman (1991) a typification refers to the meaning people attach to habituated practices. These meanings are shared amongst a social group and achieve a certain level of acceptance while in effect these meanings constitute categorical knowledge and an oversimplification of the category they describe. The typification of the student thus refers to generalised and categorical knowledge of what students are and do but this knowledge is taken for granted by the actors and perceived to be the essence of the category of the student. The way in which the typification is enacted in urban space is what I refer to as the student experience. As such, the typification of the student is in fact a membership classification device that contains set categories on which people's association with the group are evaluated (Sacks, 1989). As argued previously, while all sorts of people and institutions feed into this typification, it is predominantly students (not universities or housing developers) who are policing the line and are assessing a fellow student's membership status.

The importance of sociality and an association to the student community has been conceptualised to be one of the main ways in which to make sense of students' consumption behaviour and residential decision making. Looking more broadly at their overall engagement with their place of study a very similar observation can be made. In speaking to the participants about how they think of and use the city, I noticed that it was very common for them to speak about these practices in the First Person Plural, by using the 'we' pronoun and in doing so reiterating the importance of the group when engaging in practices in the city. Other participants made this *social primary framework* more explicit in pointing out that being in the city, especially the city centre, and engaging in practices within is inherently social. They explained that they would feel uncomfortable to be in these spaces by themselves, such as this student:

But when I'm just like walking around I like to be with people I mean I'm not sure if that's because I actually want to. [...] Maybe that's just my thing maybe that's how I perceive it. And as a result I don't feel comfortable like I'm doing something unsociable. (Tom)

Perhaps it is not unusual for any type of person to have the desire to engage in practices in the company of other people. However, relative to students' tendency to seek out places that are frequented by many other students, one interpretation of this, a *keying*, is that it indicates a limited engagement with the city mainly focusing on student-centric places.<sup>58</sup> This especially plays out in first year because its marginal contribution to students' overall grade is interpreted by them to indicate that that they are given time to work out what it means to be a student outside of university and their studies. Yet, it mainly enables them to strongly engage in certain types of commercial and student-targeted places in the city.

The pressure to do things within a group of students limits their capacity to actually explore urban space and several participants, especially those in their last year of study, made sense of their past practices in the *social primary framework* by expressing regrets with regard to not having explored the city enough, such as this student:

There is loads of places that I wanted to see like the Bombed Out Church I still haven't been inside and I have always been meaning to go inside. Anglican Cathedral I still need to go inside. I don't know it's just like finding the time and finding someone else who wants to do it. (Toby)

Several participants in their last year of study identified practices and places in the city they still had not participated in or visited and usually a lack of people to do this with was cited as the main reason.<sup>59</sup> Taking these perceptions further to the level of

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<sup>58</sup> Also other scholars noticed this tendency of students to focus on student-centric places in the city in their research (Chatterton, 1999; Holton and Riley, 2014; Holton, 2015a).

<sup>59</sup> It was interesting to notice that three of the male participants seemed to strongly relate their engagement and exploration of the city to their relationship status. All of them argued to have been more active in the city when being in a relationship and described how even their spatial patterns changed for instance, one student described to visit different nightlife facilities and indicated that in his mind some nightlife places are better suited to find a potential partner than others. While also the female participants occasionally mentioned their partners in the interviews, it was noticeable that these three male participants seemed to associate urban areas to a much larger degree with their relationships and current or former partners.

a *keying*, it seems that students, like other groups of people, are very dependent on each other to do things and as a consequence of this dependency they tend to be very active with regard to certain practices such as nightlife but at the same time develop feelings of regret with regard to the opportunity cost of frequently choosing the same places, people and practices over others. This impression of students as people who engage in a few very specific aspects of the urban life around them at the expense of feeling part of anything other than the student community was facilitated by a several participants. For instance, in the following quote a student speaks about the city centre and his perception of not being part of the urban environment there: "I don't feel like I'm part of the fabric of it. I still feel like I'm a student sort of like a tourist experiencing it" (Tom). Generally, in the *social primary framework* students made sense of their presence in the city by emphasising an element of distance to its fabric and population and they referred to themselves as "onlookers" or also "observers", such as this participant:

Yeah, it's almost like that thing about being like a tourist. Where you are kind of like an onlooker and you are really just gently involved in it. Just the way people live and how I can fit in and like appreciating the city. (Alicia)

Through this characterisation the participants tried to make sense of their status in the city as well as their engagement and practices within vis-à-vis their long-term but still usually only temporary residence.

In using the characterisation of an onlooker they actively distinguish themselves from local or other more permanent populations but also the short-term stays of tourists and visitors to the city. As such students' self-characterisation of their status in the city bears many similarities to Urry's notion of the tourist gaze (2005). This concept was already briefly discussed in Chapter Two in reference to Harvey's notion of spectacle (1992) which sees the branding of urban space as sites of specific types of consumption (economic, sensory and symbolic types of consumption), building on tourists as one group of people who are attracted by the spectacularised representations of urban space and cities as a whole. Urry's concept of the tourist gaze studies the consumption of these sites, especially its visual component with an emphasis on surface appearances (Jones, 2009), and the multitude of actors who

contribute to the creation of tangible (buildings, greenery, shops, etc.) and intangible (representations of culture) objects for the gazers. Urry's concept of the tourist gaze (2005) thus describes the ways in which tourists consume the places they are visiting as well as emphasising the partial engagement with a specific locality that this entails. The tourist gaze contains ideas around a complicated relationship between visitors and locals and how tourists make sense of their stay in a city in the backdrop of certain expectations and evaluate what they see in reference to this. Building on the insights of social constructionism, any person's gaze on an environment, no matter if she or he is a local or a visitor, is incomplete since they can only see a specific representation of reality. The tourist gaze describes a way of engaging and interpreting the environment that is particularly limited due to the time constraints of the visit but also because of preconceived ideas of what will be seen and how that should be made sense of.

In relation to Urry's concept of the tourist gaze (2005) and its function as a device of distinction between people and their practices, student lives can be interpreted in a very similar way, through the notion of the 'student gaze'. This constitutes another *keying* in the frame analysis approach of this research. The student gaze refers to a specific way of consuming the city. It is a gaze of semi-permanent residents who have a limited relationship with their city of residence characterised by frequent and repetitive engagements with specific places and objects. The gaze is highly socialised in the sense that it is mainly enacted in the presence of other students who interpret its significance in a similar way. It is thus a very distinctive gaze that seems to emphasise students' position as somewhere in between the tourist-local spectrum.<sup>60</sup> The notion of the student gaze does not just refer to the limited engagement of students with the university city but it also mentions how their practices are being situated as something separate from the life of other residents with various individual

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<sup>60</sup> As such it also bears some similarities with Simmel's poetic description of 'The Stranger' (2004) as someone who is mobile and does not own land, someone who is part of a group but in many ways never really belonged and someone who is near and far at the same time. Simmel also argued that these 'strangers' are never seen as individuals but as a group of people with several common characteristics. He states: "For this reason, strangers are not really conceived as individuals, but as strangers of a particular type: the element of distance is no less general in regard to them than the element of nearness" (2004: 77).

and institutional actors in cities (universities, investors, city councils) building on this interpretation of student life.

### Objects of the Student Gaze

All of the three analysis chapters have established ways in which students purposefully distinguish themselves from local residents and non-student populations in the city. When entering university, students have certain expectations on their lives in the city which are embedded in their understanding of what the student experience contains. Urry (2005) has argued that a whole industry creates objects for tourists to visually consume and a similar observation could be made in relation to the notion of the student gaze. Just by looking at the discussion of the *strips* of consuming and housing in the previous chapters it is simple to mark out some of these 'objects' created for students to gaze upon and to consume whether that concerns physical places (e.g. Concert Square), buildings (e.g. student accommodation) or items (e.g. university merchandise products). While most of these objects mentioned above are specifically targeted at students, in the interviews it became apparent that other objects which were more place-specific frequently became subject of their gaze and were important for a development of a sense of place (Massey, 2007).

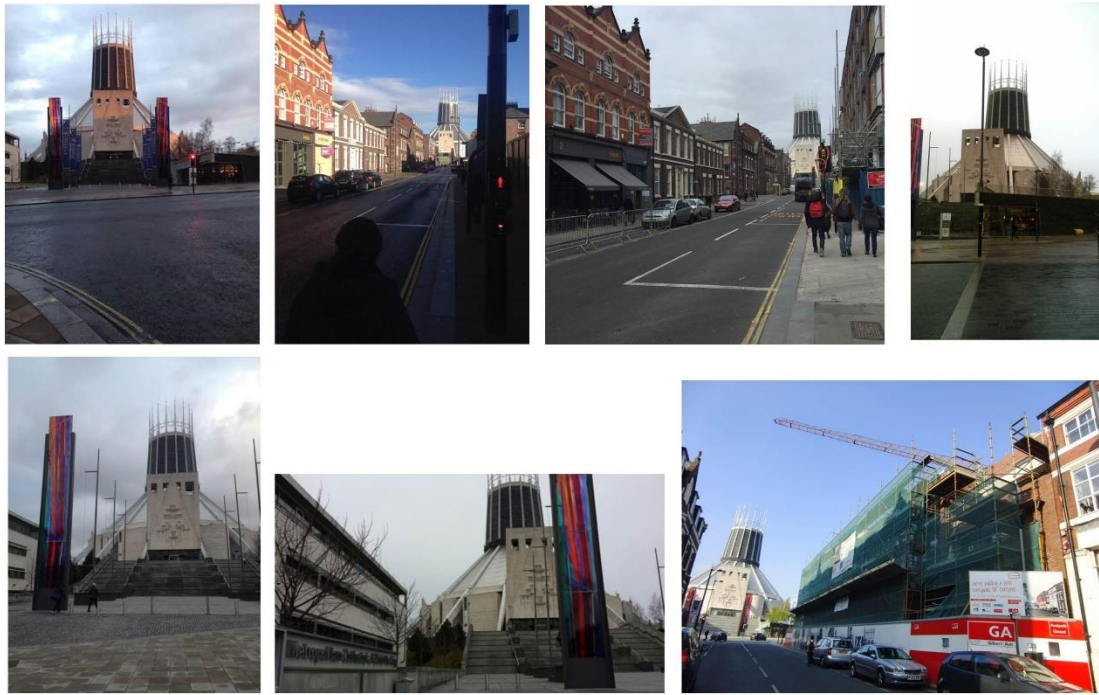
Consumption in cities does not just encompass literal purchases but cities can be consumed in sensory and symbolic ways (Harvey, 1992; Zukin, 1995; Crang, 1997; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Stevenson, 2003; Urry, 2005; Miles, 2007). Cultures, their practices, associated objects and the spaces in which these are enacted and situated can be consumed in ways that do not necessarily entail an economic transaction. Understood in this way, the consumption of spectacularised sites in the entrepreneurial city of Liverpool also forms part of the practices of students. Generally, many participants commented on Liverpool's cityscape and architecture pointing out the diversity of buildings and places in relation to their heritage, architectural style and how they are maintained, such as this student who referred to Liverpool's cityscape as a patchwork:

I'd describe it as quite a small city and actually I have used exactly like the patchwork thing to people because I think it's such a weird city with like loads of like nice and beautiful buildings and then it's like the weirdest combination with like really run down places in the middle of like beautiful places. (Stina)

It was common for students to comment on the diversity of the built environment, some positively and some negatively. However, besides general discussions of Liverpool's cityscape, in the interviews students mentioned particular buildings and spaces in the city that they see as particularly meaningful for their relationship to Liverpool. Usually a conversation about these was sparked by their autophotography project in which they included images of sites that also feature prominently in city branding and touristic advertising of the city. Three of these sites and buildings which came up the most during the conversation in the photo-elicitation and walking interviews will be discussed below. They serve as examples for the type of non-student specific places and objects that were meaningful for the participants.

Sefton Park is a large green area in close proximity to the off-campus halls of residence of the University of Liverpool and the Smithdown Road area and was a common topic of conversation in the interviews. In a previous chapter, I discussed this park in relation to the observation that green spaces are the only places in the city besides the campus that are meaningful for students throughout their whole degree time. In their discussion of this park, the participants emphasised that while they usually spend time there with other students only, they make sense of this park in the *social primary framework* as an area that is frequented by a variety of residents and visitors. In their discussion of Sefton Park during the photo-elicitation interviews, the park was framed as an area of the city that connects them with Liverpool as their specific place of study and is unique to this locality. On the level of *keying*, for students the discussion of this park and/or other green areas served as a way to demonstrate that their engagement with the city goes beyond areas, venues and events that are specifically targeted at them.

Another place in the city that was frequently pictured in the autophotography projects and subsequently also discussed in the interviews as a meaningful urban place was Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral. This cathedral is situated right next to the university campus on the side closest to the city centre and in being Liverpool's



**Figure 8.7. Images of the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral in participants' autophotography projects.**

Catholic Cathedral some participants connected to it on a religious level in their *social primary framework*. However, many non-Catholic participants described a feeling of being overwhelmed when first encountering the cathedral and making sense of it as a landmark of the city.<sup>61</sup> They described the cathedral as a symbol of Liverpool which connects them to all of the memories of their time in the city. In many ways this relates to the ability of local buildings to become perceived as place-makers. This is pointed out in discussions of 'iconic' architecture which also emphasise the mainly visual way in which these buildings and structures are consumed (Urry, 2005, Kaika, 2006; Sklair, 2006; Jones, 2009). On the level of a *keying*, while the cathedral and its immediate surroundings were not a space that the participants regularly used, symbolically the cathedral was important for their relationship to Liverpool and the recognition that the student experience takes place in a context that is specific to the city they are living in.

<sup>61</sup> As explained in the Introduction Chapter, Liverpool houses two cathedrals, the Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral and the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral denominated to the Church of England. Both cathedrals are situated at either end of Hope Street and are geographically very close to each other. It was surprising that despite the close proximity of the two cathedrals hardly any of the students had ever visited the Anglican Cathedral.

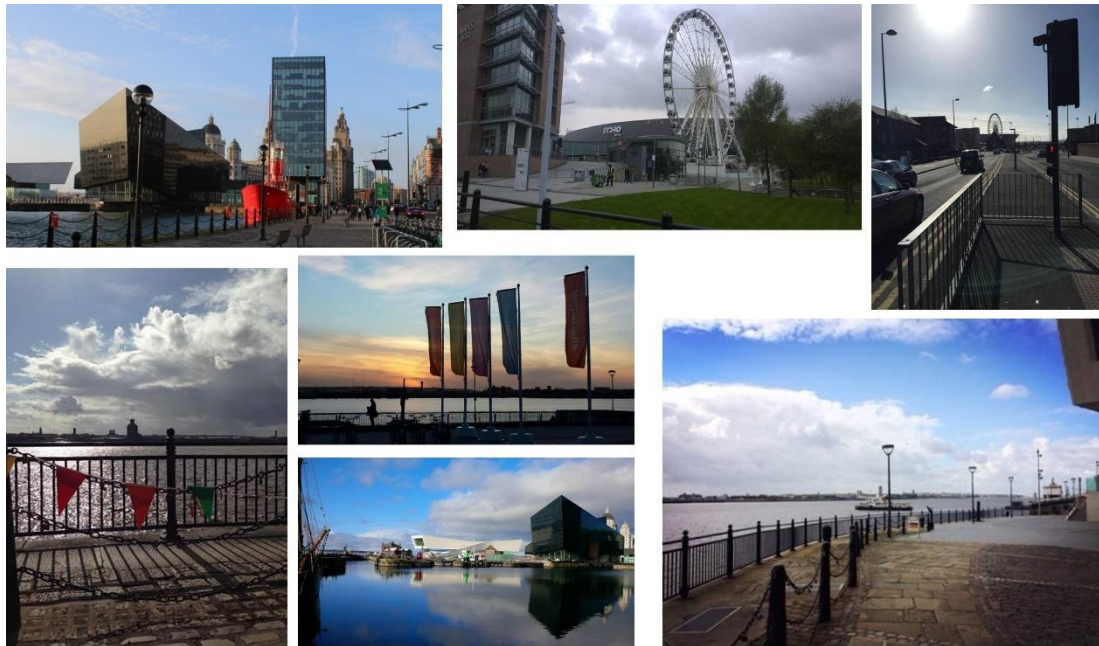


Figure 8.8. Images of Liverpool's waterfront area in participants' autophotography projects.

Another object included into the student gaze is Liverpool's waterfront. Discussions of this area of the city were prominent in the photo-elicitation and walking interviews and the participants' autophotography projects frequently included pictures of either the Albert Dock or the so called 'Three Graces'. These are three historic buildings situated close to the Albert Dock often described to be of iconic value for Liverpool (see Kaika, 2006; Sklair, 2006; Jones, 2009). They also picture prominently in various representations of Liverpool's skyline.<sup>62</sup> While a few participants reported to go to this area occasionally either to visit museums or restaurants, generally it seemed that similarly to the Metropolitan Cathedral for most participants in the *social primary framework* it serves as symbol for Liverpool but does not constitute a place that is regularly visited or used. Supporting this observation was also the tendency for most participants to describe the waterfront area as outside of their definition of the city centre despite its proximity to the commercial shopping area Liverpool One, with only a larger road separating the two.

<sup>62</sup> Liverpool's waterfront currently still holds the title of UNESCO World Heritage and is home to various public and private cultural institutions (Tate Liverpool, Slavery Museum, Maritime Museum, Museum of Liverpool Life, The Beatles Story, and many more). It connects Liverpool with the Wirral through a ferry terminal and offers an array of shops, cafes, bistros, bars and restaurants.



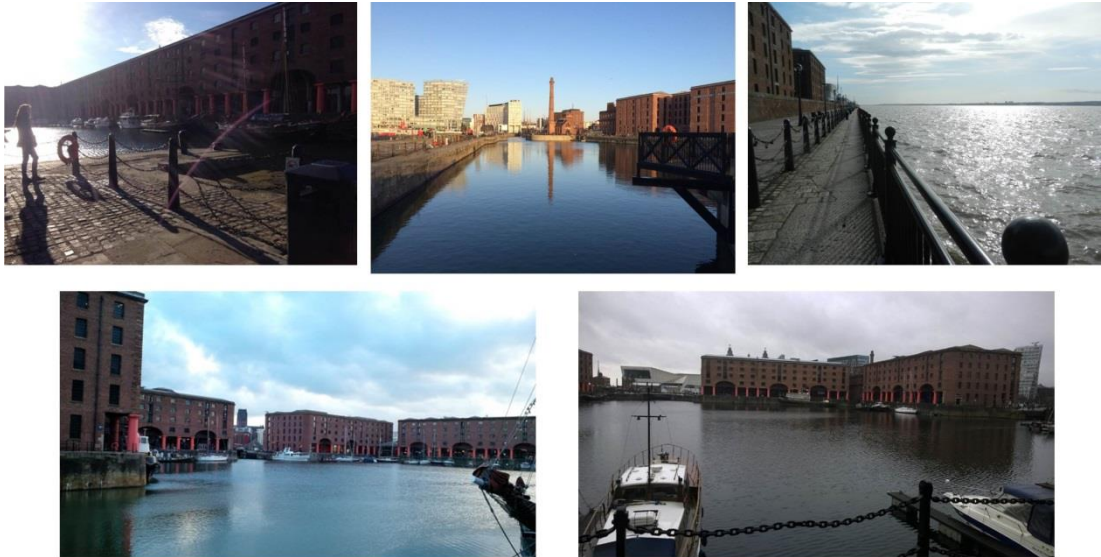


Figure 8.9. Images of Liverpool's Albert Dock in participants' autophotography projects.

Also in the walking interviews only a few participants decided to include the waterfront area in their routes. The most common theme in the *social primary framework* when discussing the waterfront area with the participants was to define it as something distinct from student life. This differentiation was put up with regard to its physical location (in the sense that it is situated on the side of Liverpool One that is the furthest away from the university and common residential locations) but also in terms of the practices that go on there. Participants described it as an out of the ordinary place which they would take visitors to or would go to deliberately to get away from the city and student life within. In having this character, on the level of a *keying* the waterfront area seemed to symbolise a broader connection and fondness the participants felt for Liverpool as their place of study and residence despite the fact that visits to this area were less common.

Several other places that become objects in the student gaze could be mentioned here but generally the ones discussed above (Sefton Park, the Metropolitan Cathedral and the waterfront) featured the most prominently in the interviews and the students' accounts of spaces in the city that are meaningful for them. Previously, I have conceptualised the student gaze as a notion that describes the partial engagement of students with their university city in which they frequently and repetitively engage with specific spaces, objects, and events targeted at them. However, the discussion above indicates that students' relationship to Liverpool also



Figure 8.10. Images of the so called 'Three Graces' in participants' autophotography projects.

comprises other spaces and sites in the city that are not specifically focused at them. What becomes apparent in the analysis of these selected places and objects is that there is an overlap between the student gaze and the tourist gaze with many of the described objects and places also featuring prominently in touristic explorations of the city (Urry, 2005). Therefore, students' engagement with the city does also comprise sites that are consumed by wider audiences. Students' sense-making of the inclusion of these areas into their lives (at least on a symbolic level) is that they are aware of a certain place-specific context in which they are trying to achieve the student experience.

What develops from this is another *keying*, which demonstrates that students have a sense of place that goes beyond student-centric areas.<sup>63</sup> It gives an indication that for them at least to some degree 'place matters'. In choosing a university city students do not just choose a specific way of student life that enables them to achieve the student experience but the place of study is also chosen with reference to more

<sup>63</sup> As argued in a previous chapter, the notion of 'a sense of place' in this thesis refers to Massey's discussion (2007) of how generic global processes can influence localities in a very specific way and in turn they are understood and made sense of within the unique context of specific place. Within this framework, the development of a sense of place was argued to refer to the attribution of meaning to the social and physical environment (Tuan, 1975; Gieryn, 2000).

unique features of the city, its built environment and its culture. In making sense of choosing Liverpool as a university city, in the *social primary framework* many participants referenced the Liverpool waterfront as one of the main reasons why they instantly liked Liverpool when visiting the city for the first time. However, the engagement with these areas and practices has to be seen in relation to students' participation in their degree, with different university years implying changing ways of relating to and acting within the city. Perhaps, the described low frequency in which these places and objects are visited should be seen in the context of students' capacity and desire to at least occasionally exit the student community in order to facilitate a stronger sense of place.

### Abandoning the Student Gaze

With regard to the notion of the student gaze and its association with a limited engagement with the city, other ways of seeing and using the city are only possible through dissociating from the group in one way or another that is exercising the gaze. Only a small number of participants described themselves to be part of a friend group in which several people were interested in dissociating from the student experience by branching out and discovering areas and places less associated with larger student populations. Previous chapters have described how students' practices change over time and over space; for instance, after their first year they tend to have the desire to dissociate themselves from incoming students by moving into a different residential neighbourhood and changing their consumption behaviour. While this desired distancing from the typification of the student and associated practices was also described to be connected to changing spatial patterns it only very rarely led to a more exploratory relationship with the university city. The following quote, in answer to my questions of which areas she is familiar with, stands exemplary for my impression of the lack of knowledge of several participants towards their place of study:

Yeah, it's literally just the Smithdown area and the centre unless someone says 'oh go here it's really good' and then we go and try it and then it would be added

to our tour. But yeah we don't really venture out unless we hear about it. We wouldn't go looking for somewhere else. (Julia)

Besides the number of participants who seemed to show a partial engagement with Liverpool, there were also a few participants who described a stronger urge to discover the city they live in; for instance, by branching out into unfamiliar areas or by visiting various cultural institutions. However, the striking similarity between all of their accounts was that these practices were done alone. In making sense of the *strip* of exploring the city, that means any type of activity connected in some ways to the intention of becoming more familiar with it, one participant described how her first two weeks alone in the city were the time when she was the most active in exploring it. Another student explained that she used the early morning hours to walk around the city, something her friends would not be interested in doing. With regard to students' exploration of their place of study three participants described to be very active in their endeavour to get to know the city. In summary, these participants would describe to walk or cycle around aimlessly and visit places just for the sake of being somewhere, to explore and to watch other people. They would describe to take photos with their cameras, a practice that made their autophotography projects stand out from the other participants, and attempt to enter buildings to see them from the inside; but most of all they would try to experience the city through all of their senses as for instance, this student described:

I think it's really important to feel a city as well as see it. Because every city is different so when I go to like another city I try to not actually see but also hear it like because it's all different, like the smells are different [...]. (Karolina)

Another student gave a very similar statement:

I walk around and what I do is to see the places, smell the places, watch the people around me, listen to them when they talk, sometimes overhear conversation, taking pictures and staring at the buildings that are a symbol of the city for me. (Carlo)

In the interviews they would give detailed accounts of their experiences of the city and we would end up speaking about Walter Benjamin's characterisation of the *flâneur* (Benjamin, 1999) or *flâneuse* (Wolff, 1985; Buck-Morss, 1986; Serlin, 2006), a concept that was unfamiliar to all of them but something they could all identify with

after I provided a little explanation. While all of them defined these walks and cycles as necessary components of their lives in the city they also described ambivalent feelings about engaging in these practices by themselves. Whereas some of these ways of experiencing the city perhaps even necessitate a degree of solitude they also pointed out to struggle to find people who would be interested in accompanying them.

A *keying* developing from this is that exploring and discovering the city is a solitary practice and can only happen if students disengage with the typification of the student. Participants found different ways of incorporating their desire to be in the city more actively and consciously. Whereas some walked or cycled around by themselves other participants described how they sought out membership in non-student communities in the city. For instance, one participant started volunteering in art galleries and another gave an elaborate account of how her Catholic faith led her to participate in various voluntary activities for people in need all over the city. Generally, all of these students described a *social primary framework* in which they made sense of the *strip* of exploring by arguing to make a conscious effort to get to know the city beyond student circles. They also spoke about the importance of place attachment in the sense of making a place feel like home and having knowledge about it and its people, as for instance, pointed out by this student:

It's really important for me to like find out about the place I'm moving rather than like... knowing what it feels like and how it's evolved and stuff like that. That was a way I made it a home because if you know about something you kind of feel more attachment to it. (Tina)

Naturally, several participants expressed the desire to make their place of study feel like a homely environment, at least temporarily, and to acquire a sense of familiarity with it but the ways in which the participants put this into practice varied. Whereas some felt content with being part of the student community and exercised the student gaze through getting to know the city through spaces and practices targeted at them, others felt the need to also go beyond "the student bubble" (Tina) to see and experience other ways of life in Liverpool.

## 8.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored a triangular relationship involving the student participants, the university, and the city of Liverpool. I discussed the *strip* of studying, a term which bundles practices that are related to the participants' university attendance and participation in their degree. I also analysed the *strip* of exploring, looking at some of the practices in the urban environment through which the participants intend to get more familiar with the city they live in. Based on their sense-making processes of their practices, several *keyings* were established which provide wider interpretations of the students' meaning structures. Since it is impossible for anyone to always act in a rational way, sometimes these sense-making processes seem to be inconsistent with students' practices or other types of reasoning they apply. Through the frame analysis approach this is referred to as a *fabrication* rather than a *keying* and although it still contains a wider interpretation of the participants' understanding of actions, it is an analysis tool which aims to emphasise a certain contradiction in their accounts.

The first part of the chapter focused on the *strip* of studying and a *keying* established how the marginal contribution of students' first year is entangled with their understanding of the student experience. In terms of assessment, students only need to achieve a pass mark of 40% in order to complete their first year. Furthermore, their actual mark in this year of study does not influence the grade average once they have completed their undergraduate degree. Because of this regulation, when students start attending HE they make sense of what it means to be a student primarily outside of university. This is a paradox considering that students pay full tuitions fees in their first year in order to spend more money on commercial and student-targeted activities in the city. The participants' defence of this regulation has been referred to here as a *fabrication* because it contradicts other accounts by the same participants that deemed this arrangement as problematic. In summary of these points, the marginal contribution of first year does not just give students an unrealistic idea of what university is about but it effectively reproduces inequalities. It enables them to enact the typification of the student, a practice that is bound of with all sorts of external and internal processes of distinction. Giving students the scope to enact this

typification in the city means that any student who differs from ways of being and living that are not included in the typification will experience a sense of exclusion from the group.

The process in which first year's marginal contribution to students' degree influences the way and frequency they engage in various activities in the urban environment is one example of an interdependence that exists between students' university participation and their relationship to the city. Another example of this interdependence is constituted by the *keying* that the participants did not just choose a university but the city the institution is situated in was an important decision factor. Choosing a city (and not just a university) was central for the participants because as prospective students they aspired to a certain vision of their life as undergraduates but educational achievements only formed one component of this idea. Students are aware that several of the expectations that they have on student life play out in the urban environment rather than on campus. Because of that the geography of the university is an important decision factor. Particularly important is the role of sociality in this vision. In imaging their lives in the urban environment, students have the expectation that they will engage in certain activities in the company of other students. This means that students' vision of their life in the university city is predominantly spatial and social (rather than just educational).

By looking at the ways in which students' relationship to the city and their participation in their degree are entangled, the chapter moved on to discuss the *strip* of exploring. Different university years are connected to changing engagements with the place of study. Because of the expectation that student life is a highly social way of spending time (mainly in terms of engaging in various activities with other students), another *keying* showed that students have a limited engagement with the city. Their dependency on each other means that they are extremely active with regard to a few areas and practices but miss out on several others. The concept of the student gaze describe this particular engagement with the city. It refers to a process in which students distinguish themselves from other populations and their practices through particular ways of seeing, using and thinking of the city they live in. The concept describes students' frequent engagement with a small amount of places

and facilities in the city, many of them specifically targeted at students. However, while the student gaze contains several objects that are student-specific also others objects that are not just consumed by student populations are part of the gaze.

Based on the participants' account, in this chapter I discussed three of these objects that are contained in the student gaze but are not exclusive to it. Sefton Park, the Metropolitan Cathedral and the waterfront area of Liverpool featured prominently in the interviews and were discussed in detail with the participants. As a *keying*, green spaces turned out to be the only areas in the city besides the campus that were important to the students throughout their whole degree time and were not replaced with other urban spaces. The other two sites (the cathedral and the waterfront) were of symbolic significance rather than constituting lived spaces. They represent a connection that students feel towards Liverpool as their place of study. Further, they show that despite the often partial engagement with the city, the development of some sense of place is part of the student gaze. While students' movement through the city is a socially motivated process that serves to build associations with other students, it also enables them to develop a relationship with urban space and get to know the city they are living in. However, as the final *keying* has pointed out, the achievement of a stronger sense of place requires students to temporarily or even fully leave the student community. Exploring the city beyond the student gaze is a solitary activity only possible through dissociating from the typification of the student and the aspiration to achieve the full student experience.

Outside of the discussion of students' residential and nightlife patterns (e.g. Chatterton, 1999, 2002, 2010; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002, 2004; Smith, 2005; Smith and Holt, 2007; Hubbard, 2008, 2009; Holton and Riley, 2013; Smith et al., 2014;), the role of place has hardly been considered in research about students in cities but is a central theme to the analysis presented in this thesis. Taking an almost entrepreneurial stance, Russo et al (2007; also Russo and Tatjer, 2007, 2010; Russo and Sans, 2009) have argued that students are important economic actors in cities and should be capitalised on more. While several years have passed since these publications, my observations of the politics of Liverpool City Council, in particular with regard to the massive proliferation of PBSA (Liverpool City Council, 2018b), is



that students have been identified as an economically powerful group in the city and are certainly being capitalised on. However, my discussion of the notion of the student experience and the way it is entangled with supposedly right and wrong ways of consuming in the city in many ways criticises these ideas and assumptions. My analysis attempts to offer a more nuanced discussion of the role of place in students' lives arguing that being a student is not just enacted in relation to the university and its campus but takes place in the context of the whole city. Effectively the city becomes the playground where students' ambition to achieve the full student experience is realised. The student experience thus does not just contain rigid ideas about what to do but particularly also where to do it. As such, my research contributes to broader debates around how places come to be markers of distinction for certain cultures, at certain times and while acting exclusionary on many, seem to facilitate group membership for some (Harvey, 1989, 1992; Zukin, 1995; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Stevenson, 2003; Hall, 2004; Miles et al., 2004; Massey, 2007; Sibley, 2015).

## CHAPTER 9

### Concluding Analysis

What is students' relationship to their university city and how do they develop a sense of place therein? Using the insights of empirical phenomenology in combination with a frame analysis approach, I have analysed the accounts of students with regard to their practices and accounts of such. Liverpool is a city that is shaped by its student populations and the infrastructure that is created to cater for them. Learning what it means to be a student is fundamentally a social process that is not just shaped by students themselves but by a variety of other people and institutions. In studying undergraduate students and their spatial practices, one of the overarching conclusions of this thesis is that being a student is socially and spatially a complex time; place matters for students in making sense of their progression through university and the spatial shifts that accompany this.

There are many ways in which students' urban culture could be studied. In this research, I have been interested in meaning and how it is generated around urban space. Phenomenology is a methodology that is concerned with the study of meaning and aims to get an understanding of how the social world appears to people (e.g. Schutz, 1972; Sixsmith and Sixsmith, 1987; Berger and Luckman, 1991; Mohanty, 1997; Aspers, 2009; Lewis and Staehler, 2010; Bennett, 2013). Against this backdrop, I chose the methods of autophotography, photo-elicitation and walking interviews to gain an understanding of the ways in which meaningful social practices are bound up with the environment in which they take place (e.g. Becker, 1974, 1998; Ferrarotti, 1993; Harper, 1998; Kusenbach, 2003; Anderson, 2004 Knowles and Sweetman, 2004; Rose, 2007, 2014 Anderson and Jones, 2009; Holton and Riley, 2014). In selecting case study sites, methods, participants and analytical strategies I have been engaged in a process of excluding other research possibilities. Numerous examples of 'closed down research opportunities' in this study could be listed here but ultimately, my interest in exploring the notion of the student experience, particularly its social and spatial dimension from the perspective of university students, led me

to adopt an approach that studies how cultural groups are embedded in the entrepreneurial city and how they make sense of such.

How people move around and make sense of city space requires the use of mixed methods to capture its complexities. Although the methods that were employed here constituted useful tools with which to explore people's social and spatial practices, in many ways they can also be conceptualised as a "messy method" (Mellor, 2001; see also Rose, 1997; Law, 2004). In the interviews, some of the things the participants said seemed initially unrelated to the central research objectives and besides the transcripts I ended up with photographs and maps whose purpose for the display of this thesis was for a long time not clear to me. However, perhaps the 'messy' character of the data is a reflection of the complexities involved in studying how people create meaning, based on the idea that these meaning structures are not always rational and coherent.

The frame analysis approach described in this thesis offers the possibility to develop broader interpretations from the participants' sense-making, *keyings*. Yet, it is also able to highlight these inconsistencies that are inherent to any actor's meaning-structure through the concept of *fabrications*. Ultimately, within this analytic approach, my position is omnipresent and significantly influences every stage of the research. Therefore, the study presented here should be understood as situated knowledge; it is in many ways my own construction of how the student experience is understood from the position of others (Haraway, 1988; Katz, 1992; McDowell, 1992; England, 1994; Moss, 1995; Rose, 1997; Merriam et al., 2001). Here, I draw on and summarise the *keyings* and *fabrications* that were established in previous analysis chapters. What follows thus relates back to the participants since these analytical tools are essentially developed out of the students' accounts of what they do in the city and how this is meaningful. Yet, rather than restating the working of the analytical approach, in this chapter I will focus on the key points that can be drawn out of them.

## 9.1. The Student Experience – an Aspirational Category?

The notion of the student experience forms the foundation of this thesis. It is a term that is commonly used by all sorts of people, whether they are university managers, academics, journalists, public servants or students themselves but is very little understood in its meaning (Pötschulat et al., n.d.). In the analytic approach the student experience constitutes the frame implying that everything discussed here in terms of *strips*, *social primary frameworks*, *keyings* and *fabrications* is contained in it (Goffman, 1974). The student experience thus contains the students' account of their own practices (grouped into the four *strips* of consuming, living, studying and exploring) and the associated meaning structures attached to it. Essentially, *strips* are umbrella terms for a much wider variety of practices that are made sense of within *the social primary framework*. Together, the *strips* and *social primary frameworks* form the typification of the student. This concept was adopted from Berger and Luckman (1991) and describes how the meanings of habituated practices can constitute categorical knowledge that is an oversimplification of what is going on. In this sense, the typification of the student describes categorical and simplified knowledge of what students are and do, acquired through various socialisation processes. Most of these already take place before entering university but still shape the way practices are experienced and made sense of.

All of these analytic tools are contained in the frame. The frame is thus a structure that entails (but also hides) the complex layers of meaning that comprise it. Because of that, the frame is interpreted to be a social construction (Berger and Luckman, 1991); it contains a version of reality and ways of interpreting it that are taken for granted by the actors. In this research, the social construction that constitutes the frame of the analysis is the student experience. This notion is commonly used by all sorts of people who are to varying degrees involved with students and HE in general, whether that is university staff and managers, accommodation and leisure service providers or scholars who study the implications of HE in the UK. Also students use the notion of the student experience in order to describe and justify their practices in the city but also to emphasise the spatial and temporal context in which these take

place. The student experience thus entails categorical knowledge about what it means to be a student (a typification) but the notion is also sensitive to the spatial setting in which these ideas are being enacted.

Despite the common usage of the term student experience its actual meaning is very little understood and it seems to be employed in contradictory ways (Pötschulat et al., n.d.). The participants who took part in this research were either able to relate to this term when I brought it up or even specifically mentioned it themselves in the interviews.<sup>64</sup> Overall, they used it to refer to the idea that being a student is about much more than 'just' attending university and relates to multiple urban practices. What became apparent in this research is that the student experience is an aspirational, social and spatial category. Students make sense of this time in their life as aspiring to have the full student experience against the backdrop of fears of missing out or being excluded from the student community if they are less able or willing to succeed in this endeavour. Ultimately, the student experience describes a specific way of life in the university city, and a process by which students make sense of what it means to be a student outside of the university campus and its educational and leisure spaces. In other words, the social space of the university stretches far beyond the campus and extends to other areas of the city. The category of student experience is interpreted by students to contain a strong set of ideas about what it means to be a student (the typification) and where these ideas should be enacted.

The notion of the student experience can be understood in connection to 'experience economies' (Pine and Gilmore, 1998 and 1999; Sundbo and Sørensen, 2013; Svabo et al., 2013). In this literature, place has been conceptualised as a highly marketable item in terms of experience. All sorts of consumption practices are bound up with the quest to 'achieve the full experience', whether that concerns engagement in nightlife or living in specific areas and types of accommodation, which means that the student experience is effectively describing a particular form of consumerism. Also visual and

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<sup>64</sup> It was interesting to notice that six out of the seven non-UK students who took part did not seem to understand this term in quite the same way. When asked they mainly associated the student experience with educational aspects and facilities in the university and only marginally counted practices outside of university and its campus into the concept.

symbolic consumption of specific spaces and objects in the city are bound up with students' understanding of the student experience. In other words, through consuming students obtain (and buy) the student experience and with it most importantly the membership to a student community. However, students make sense of this experience mainly in social and spatial rather than economic terms. Some of the *fabrications* that were discussed here for instance, the idea that students are poor or that student nights are cheap, effectively obfuscates the relationship between the student experience and consumption. To put it differently, the notion of the student experience does not just tell students what to do but it also prescribes a specific way of interpreting these practices that would not compromise the consumerist essence of the notion.

## 9.2. Policing the Line: External and Internal Distinction

Social groups always find ways to draw boundaries between 'them' and the perceived 'other' and students are no different in this (Simmel, 1964; Bourdieu, 2004; Miles et al., 2004). In this research, the frame analysis approach has shown that group membership entails certain practices (*strips*) and a specific way of making sense of them in the *social primary framework*. Learning what it means to be a student is a highly socialised process that plays out in – and shapes – urban space. Student culture is characterised by processes of distinction to the extent that in almost every aspect of their lives, students physically and socially separate themselves from their environment and various populations in the city. Within these processes of distinction it is not just everyone who is not a student that is excluded but significantly it is also students that constitute 'the other' in external and internal distinction processes. However, it is not just students who facilitate these processes but various other actors (including universities, developers and entertainment providers) maintain and prosper from the assumption that student culture requires student-specific spaces in the city. In doing so, they make places with this assumption in mind and offer different markers of distinction for students to take up.

One of the main processes of distinction in student culture occurs towards the non-student population of the city, a group of people whose diversity was generalised by the participants via the term 'locals' and not specified any further. An active and verbally explicit process of distinction towards this diverse group was noticeable especially in terms of students' social time. Students made sense of their use of the city centre in contrast to when other groups are frequenting it, describing that the time-logic to their nightlife practices is mainly due to a desired separation from non-student populations. Students' residential choices were interpreted through the same logic, with the desire to live with other students only in order to be able to keep up the specific social time that is part of student culture. The aspiration to discover what it means to be a student only in relation to other students was summarised by this participant through an interesting analogy: "[It's] like being around loads of people your own age in the same way maybe like a festival and have fun and not have a job like not have responsibilities" (Tom). Separation from non-student populations is thus emphasised as a desirable aspect to student culture based on the idea that outside influences could potentially disturb the specific social dynamic of the student experience.

Ultimately however, various actors are influential in facilitating the idea that students' lives are supposed to run separately from the lives of others (Chatterton, 1999; Smith, 2005; Hubbard, 2009; Goddard and Vallance, 2013). Enabled by the city council, there are developers who create accommodation which is socially and physically segregated from the surroundings (Smith, 2005; Smith and Holt, 2007; Kenna, 2011). Universities put on freshers' fairs which contain several commercial assumptions about how students should fill their time (Chatterton, 1999). One aspect of this is entertainment providers who facilitate students' social time logic by putting on student-targeted events on nights of weekdays. The student experience is thus conceptualised as something that is separate from the lives of others and therefore constitutes a process of distinction that students are socialised into and are often only vaguely able to critique or question.

The distinction (Bourdieu, 2004) at play in student culture is also characterised by an internal dimension. Based on the physical and social segregation of student lives,

being a student is interpreted as a very collective experience which means that minor differences between students and how as individuals they are able to relate to the student experience can ostracise them from the community. Students assign a social logic to their consumption practices arguing that the creation and maintenance of social relationships requires them to engage in certain types of consuming. This is a rather reflexive position to adopt because students recognise that the aim of these practices (such as visiting restaurants, cafes or clubs) is to feel socially integrated. Places in the city are primarily chosen according to their potential to offer group membership. Residential choices follow a similar logic in the sense that they are not purely economic decisions based on the associated costs of living in a particular house and location. Social factors play an important part in making a housing decision since different residential locations in the city are associated with varying degrees of membership to the student community. As a result of this logic, it is not just non-student populations who are 'the other' but any student who is not able to consume or live in the way that is seen to be part of the student experience will feel a sense of exclusion and personal flaw.

### 9.3. Space and Place in Student Culture

Processes of distinction have an important spatial component. Students do not just distinguish themselves from other students through their practices but also through the spaces in which these are performed. As I have argued in this thesis, when students enter their second and third year of study they increasingly attempt to distinguish themselves from newer cohorts of students. Importantly this process contains a spatial separation. Areas of the city have different values assigned to them with regard to the kinds of behaviours and types of people that are present there (e.g. Harvey, 1989, 1992; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Paton et al., 2012). As a consequence, space is used as a way to create a separation from other cohorts of students. The changing social practices over time and space implies that different urban areas become incorporated into new practices and symbolise this process of distinction. Space is used to emphasise this desired separation which also constitutes a distancing from the notion of the student experience. While students interpret this



process as a pathway towards adulthood, students only distance themselves from the student experience through slightly different consumption and housing patterns but at the same time, as this research showed, do not seem to lose the desire to keep up the markers of distinction towards non-student groups. Urban areas are incorporated into student culture in different ways throughout their degree with processes of distinction becoming more rather than less pronounced since students do not just uphold the distinction to non-students but increasingly aim to distinguish themselves from other groups and cohorts of students.

The notion of 'a student gaze' was introduced to describe students' partial engagement with the university city and student-centric spaces within giving students the impression of not being fully integrated in their place of study. This draws attention to how students' practices and use of space is contingent on several processes of distinction, especially a desired separation from non-student populations of the city. The notion of the student experience itself is not sensitive to place and could be enacted anywhere but wherever it is taken up, it is made sense of within a certain locality that carries a specific local context (Massey, 2006, 2007). In other words, the student experience contains practices and their meanings that are enacted in a specific spatial context and are adapted to the locality in which they occur. Place is important – it matters – since students do not just choose a university but are also very aware of choosing the city around it and with that a specific vision of how the student experience could potentially be lived out.

Different years of study in university are entangled with a changing relationship to the urban environment in which students try to make sense of the distinctive character of the place in which they live. The notion of the student gaze with its focus on intangible and tangible 'objects' shows that students do develop a sense of place in their university city that is somehow sensitive to the specific local context they are acting in. Students try to engage with the specificities of the city they are living in but at the same time, the aspiration to achieve the full student experience strongly impedes the creation of a more meaningful sense of place, something that can only be obtained when (temporarily) leaving the student community. Place is thus a very important factor in student culture not just because it is used as a facilitator of

processes of distinction but also because it offers students an opportunity to question the ideas and logic contained in the student experience.

#### 9.4. Emphasising Place in the Study of Students

As it was discussed in detail in Chapter Three, numerous scholars have provided valuable and original contributions to the study of students in UK university cities and much of the research presented here builds on their accounts but also aims to take them further. Research on the phenomenon of studentification was identified here as the largest body of literature about the topic of students in cities in studying students' housing patterns from the perspective of local policy, neighbourhood change and demographic transformations (for instance, in Smith, 2005; Smith and Holt, 2007; Hubbard, 2008; Hubbard, 2009; Kenna, 2011; Holton and Riley, 2013; Smith et al., 2014; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). Also my research on undergraduate students in Liverpool confirms the *laissez faire* policy of local governments with regard to the licensing of student HMO and the resulting difficulties in accurately recording if and when neighbourhoods become unbalanced (Smith, 2005, 2008, 2011; Allinson, 2006; Hubbard, 2008, 2009; Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b). Furthermore, while scholars have argued that studentification and gentrification are in many ways distinct urban process, they hypothesised that typical ways of student living facilitate a preference for residential segregation based on categories such as class, education and age (Smith, 2005; Smith and Holt, 2007; Hubbard, 2009; Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b). Achieving a degree of segregation from non-student populations and other student cohorts was established here as a major aspect to the student experience, not just visible when studying the students' sense-making of their residential patterns but also with regard to many other practices in the city.

Being an undergraduate student in the current context involves complex processes of external and internal distinction that are acted out in space. This finding builds on analyses of students' residential segregation and develops them further. Since most of the research on students' residential choices does not actually engage with students' accounts and their sense-making processes, analysis is limited as to how

students perceive their city, their neighbourhoods and why they chose some areas over others. Building on this gap, my research has shown that particular urban areas (in and outside of residential areas) are understood in terms of offering membership and that through their spatial choices students aim to gain access to the student community and the social relationships and friendships that form part of it. As a consequence, residential areas are primarily judged on their potential to offer this membership and the perceived social security that comes with it. As such, my research adds to accounts of the lived experiences of students in their residential environments. In introducing the ideal-typical student housing pathway (Chapter Seven) it indicates that more individualised ways of living are bound up with central urban locations. In doing so, this research contributes to studies of urban residential pathways (Christie, et al., 2002; Rugg, et al., 2004; Andersson et al., 2012; Holton, 2014b, 2015a; Smith and Hubbard, 2014).

Discussions around the notion of the 'neoliberal university' have emphasised how universities are increasingly reliant on private funding and as a consequence of that have begun to resemble businesses in their management and decision making processes (Scanlon, 2007; Chatterton, 2010; Ibrahim, 2011; Holton and Riley, 2013; McGettigan, 2013; Mountz et al., 2015). In pursuing HE, students are placed in the centre of a market transaction that turns them into consumers and as such also reviewers of services that they have paid a high price for (Smith and Holt, 2007; Chatterton, 2010; Ibrahim, 2011; McGettigan, 2013). The discussion of students' spatial choices that was presented in this analysis develops this point further in arguing that ideas around what it means to be a student are almost on every level (inside and outside of university) bound up with consumption practices. The student experience that is so vividly advertised by HEI is in effect a guideline about how to consume in exchange for access to a community and social ties. As this research has shown, while students' aspiration to achieve the full experience is connected to primarily economic practices, students make sense of this endeavour in social terms and as a consequence struggle to detect its consumerist essence.

Similar to the results of this research, several other scholars have pointed at the importance for students to feel part of a collective (Holdsworth, 2006; Smith and

Holt, 2007; Chow and Healey, 2008; Holton, 2015a). As Holdsworth (2006, 2009) and Andersson et al. (2012) have argued, ideas around what it means to be a student seem to contain rigid categories for instance in terms of class and residential arrangements giving anyone who does not fit these criteria a sense of missing out and not fitting in (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Clayton et al., 2009; Holdsworth, 2009; Lehmann, 2009; Chatterton, 2010; Mangan et al., 2010; Hinton, 2011; Bathmaker et al., 2013; Bradley and Ingram, 2013; Holton, 2014a). This thesis extends the analysis of practices of 'othering' in the student community by arguing that anyone who does not comply with the student experience and its consumerist essence is at fear of being excluded and ostracised. Several examples for this were provided in this thesis whether it concerned participants who were not able or willing to engage in nightlife like their peers, those participants who chose residential arrangements outside of halls, PBSA and HMO or those students whose desire to engage with the city beyond student areas meant that they had excluded themselves to some degree from the student community. The student experience is thus not just socially but also, spatially and financially a category that brings about all sorts of inequalities and exclusions.

An original contribution of this thesis to existing research is the emphasis on the role of place in what it means to be a student, an aspect that has hardly been established outside of studentification research. Only a few scholars have studied topics connected to this for instance, with regard to students' position in urban economies (Van den Berg and Russo, 2004; Russo et al., 2007; Russo and Tatjer, 2007, 2010; Russo and Sans, 2009), their changing engagement with urban space over time (Holton and Riley, 2014; Holton, 2015a) or their involvement in commercial nightlife landscapes of their place of study (Chatterton, 1999, 2002, 2010; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002 and 2004; Hubbard, 2014). Some of the findings of these scholars were also confirmed by my research, for instance, the observation that students' practices in the city change from year to year (Holton, 2015a) or the identification of a specific temporal and spatial logic with regard to the engagement of students in nightlife (Chatterton, 1999). However, the aim of this research was to demonstrate that place matters with regard to every aspect connected to students' lives because

it constitutes a marker of distinction through which the self and others are classified. The social construction of the student experience captures this proposition in arguing that students have strong ideas of what it means to be a student and the types of practices that this entails but perhaps more importantly they also form assumptions about where these practices should be carried out. These spatial assumptions are adapted to the specific university city the students find themselves in, the student experience is thus also place-specific. In turn, the spatial character of the student experience offers numerous opportunities for private sector actors and city governments to capitalise on students and their practices in cities. The student experience is thus intrinsically connected to urban politics and entrepreneurial strategies of city councils.

## 9.5. Students in the Entrepreneurial City

At the beginning of this thesis, I wrote about a student accommodation development on Liverpool's Hope Street and how the bricks that fell off its facing are symbolic for the types of conflicts around the presence of large student populations in cities and the different ways in which infrastructure for them is made sense of. Meanings of places are contested and diverse grounding the study of a sense of place in people's individual perceptions and accounts of the world in order to understand how they generate and attribute meaning (Rodman, 1992; Feld and Basso, 1996; Gieryn, 2000; Massey, 2006, 2007; Seamon and Sowers, 2008). Influencing the meanings of place in order to attract certain audiences has been argued to be one feature of urban entrepreneurialism, a strategy in urban politics that facilitates the attraction of economic growth and investment to a specific locality (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Logan and Molotch, 2013). In its reliance on private sector investment in reimagining, rebranding and regenerating the city, commercial actors and companies are given power to shape the urban environment in ways that benefit their own profit-seeking interests (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Brenner and Theodore, 2002). In symbolic economies, culture is emphasised in the creation of images of diversity and cosmopolitanism, when in effect the entrepreneurial city uses the commodification of culture for the purpose of selling and marketing the city

(Harvey, 1992; Zukin, 1995; Stevenson, 2003). Culture becomes a saleable item and within this narrative of urban growth and prosperity only some cultures are emphasised, but often come to represent the culture of a city as a whole (Zukin, 1995; Miles, 2007). In their promotion of specific cultural groups as dominant in a particular space, entrepreneurial cities create social, cultural and spatial hierarchies which turn the urban environment into a place of division, segregation and exclusion (Stevenson, 2003; Hall, 2004; Sibley, 2015).

Student lives and the notion of the student experience are in many ways a text-book example for the commodification of a culture for the purpose of attracting more investment into the city. Over decades, the private sector has become increasingly involved in the provision of all kinds of services and products to students, a development that went side by side with the described neoliberalisation of Higher Education which increasingly shifts the financial risk of attending university onto the students (e.g. Chatterton, 2010; McGettigan, 2013; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). Students are often held directly responsible for the conflicts that are caused through their large-scale presence in certain urban environments as well as the construction of infrastructure catering for them and how this sparks visible urban change (e.g. Smith, 2005, 2008, Allinson, 2006; Hubbard, 2008, 2009; Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b).

The student experience is highly contingent on processes of distinction and segregation vis-à-vis the desired membership to a specific group and is thus also a major facilitator of the exclusion of various groups of people from urban environments at specific times or even entirely. University students are seen as the supposed beneficiaries of these developments and offers (student accommodation, student nights, freshers fairs) when actually they are a group of people that is also negatively affected by these processes. The sort of developments that supposedly cater for them spark internal processes of distinction and exclusion within the student community because of the commodified nature of many practices and the associated financial costs. The student experience contains all sorts of ideas of what it means to be a student within a particular environment and creates pressure to live up to what it allegedly contains. However, the amorphous but also contradictory nature of the practices and meaning structures inherent to the student experience

makes it in many ways impossible for students to ever feel as if they have achieved its 'full potential'. Furthermore, students are so preoccupied in negotiating these components that it impacts their achievements in university. In this process, they lose parts of their ability but also autonomy to actually question these ideas and develop different approaches to student life.

Processes of distinction which emphasise the importance of the in-group in social practices, facilitate a certain passiveness because it is less about creating their own practices and meanings but more about adopting what is offered and what everyone else is seemingly doing. The commodification of culture in entrepreneurial cities thus also causes a level of inactiveness as well as a certain inability of members of this group to shape their own practices and sense-making processes outside of the meaning structure that is offered to them. As I have noticed with the participants of this research, the justification and defence of the student experience is often packaged into a language of care and protection. Students make sense of the student experience in social terms and argue that it helps them to facilitate social relationships and gives them a sense of direction in this new life phase. The student experience is thus entangled with the rationale of the entrepreneurial city and associated with it the accumulation of symbolic capital since students have the impression that following its logic of consumption rewards them by giving them access to a community of friendship and support. At the same time those who question the student experience or are not able to take part in it are punished by other students with exclusion from the group. The discussion of students' changing social and spatial practices over time in this thesis shows that they are aware of this dynamic and in one way or another start to question this logic in later years of their studies, realising that ultimately it constitutes a barrier for the development of a more meaningful and context specific relationship to place.

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed the practices and meaning structures inherent to the construction of the student experience from the perspective of undergraduate students from the University of Liverpool. Students establish their lives as separate from those of other city residents in reference to a particular spatial and temporal logic inherent to their practices in the city. At the same time, several

commercial actors in urban spaces facilitate, build on and profit from the integration of students as a socially, culturally and physically distinct group in the city. Student accommodation developments and the provision of leisure services (all discussed in this thesis) are one example for the potential of commercial actors to profit from the creation of segregated urban spaces for students. These processes and actors thus epitomises the tendency of the entrepreneurial city to create polarised landscapes building on the segregation of different cultures and profiting from it.

As it became apparent in this research, universities are implicit in these processes for several reasons. In their role as employer, consumer, property developer and place maker they are key players in entrepreneurial cities like Liverpool (Russo et al., 2007; Russo and Sans, 2009; Goddard and Vallance, 2011, 2013; The University of Liverpool, 2015; Liverpool John Moores University, 2017). In mimicking commercial business models through their organisational setup, universities implement and facilitate the increasing commodification of the university campus and education itself, turning students into consumers (Scanlon, 2007; Chatterton, 2010; Ibrahim, 2011; Holton and Riley, 2013; McGettigan, 2013; Mountz et al., 2015). In this backdrop, the student experience becomes a tool of entrepreneurial cities and neoliberal actors within to associate group affiliation with consumption in certain spaces, at certain times.

Universities are key actors in facilitating this association due to their entanglement with local economies but also due to their internal structures. As it was argued here, the lack of emphasis on assessment in students' first year of undergraduate studies implied to the participants that making sense of what it means to be a student should primarily take place away from university and its educational spaces. The underlying assumption of the student experience is that being a student is about much more than attending university but relates to a variety of practices in the urban environment. This social construction of what students are and do effectively pushes them into the arms of commercial providers who are eager to sell their products, activities and services as being part of the student experience. In this sense, it is not just city councils, private developers or service providers that are enabling the commercial nature of the student experience but also universities are important



actors facilitating entrepreneurial strategies. Students' sense-making of themselves and each other is bound up with this rationale and the associated spaces of the city.

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# Appendices

## APPENDIX A: List of Interviews

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Auto- photography</b>	<b>Date of the photo- elicitation interview</b>	<b>Date of the walking interview</b>
<b>1</b>	Alicia	Yes	24 <sup>th</sup> November 2014	n/a
<b>2</b>	Anna	Yes	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	n/a
<b>3</b>	Carlo	Yes	25 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	4 <sup>th</sup> May 2015
<b>4</b>	Chun	Yes	16 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	n/a
<b>5</b>	Fang	Yes	16 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	n/a
<b>6</b>	George	Yes	23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2015	19 <sup>th</sup> May 2015
<b>7</b>	Julia	Yes	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2014	15 <sup>th</sup> December 2014
<b>8</b>	Karolina	Yes	9 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	15 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
<b>9</b>	Kate	Yes	16 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	n/a
<b>10</b>	Laura	Yes	16 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	12 <sup>th</sup> May 2015
<b>11</b>	Liling	Yes	20 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	n/a
<b>12</b>	Luna	Yes	25 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	n/a
<b>13</b>	Maria	Yes	16 <sup>th</sup> December 2014	22 <sup>nd</sup> January 2015
<b>14</b>	Mark	Yes	19 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	n/a
<b>15</b>	Max	Yes	25 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	7 <sup>th</sup> May 2015
<b>16</b>	Sandra	Yes	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2014	16 <sup>th</sup> December 2014
<b>17</b>	Stina	Yes	10 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	n/a
<b>18</b>	Tina	Yes	20 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	n/a
<b>19</b>	Toby	Yes	13 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	1 <sup>st</sup> May 2015
<b>20</b>	Tom	Yes	12 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	14 <sup>th</sup> March 2015

## APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form



### Committee on Research Ethics

#### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Title of Research Project:**

**Students in Cities – Perceptions, Experiences and Interactions**

**Researcher(s): Dr Paul Jones, Dr John Sturzaker and Maike Pötschulat**

Please tick

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated October 2014 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. ☐
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish. ☐
4. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications. ☐
5. I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes: transcription of interviews. ☐
6. I understand that taking part in this research might include taking photos and I agree that this material can be anonymously reproduced for the following purposes: final thesis, research-relevant presentations. ☐
7. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____ Participant name	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Name of person taking consent	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature

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**Student Researcher:**

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**[October 2014]**

## APPENDIX C: Participant Information Sheet



### Participant Information Sheet

#### **Title: Students in Cities – Perceptions, Experiences and Interactions**

You are being invited to take part in a research study but before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please read the following information carefully and feel free to ask any questions on aspects that might not be clear. I would like to stress that you are in no obligation to accept this invitation and participation is completely voluntarily.

#### The research:

The purpose of this study is to investigate students' perceptions and sense-making of their university city and to investigate their level of engagement with it as well as the nature of their interaction with other city users. Previous research on students in the city has mainly focused on residential aspects connected to neighbourhood change. However, this research will situate students in the broader urban fabric, investigating the under-researched aspect of students' experiences of central urban areas and the meaning they attribute to them. Case study sites for this research are central urban areas in Liverpool (UK) and Berlin (Germany). Approximately twenty students aged 18 or older will be recruited for this research and you have been selected because you fit this criterion. The research is conducted by Maike Pötschulat, a postgraduate researcher in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology and it will form the basis of my doctoral thesis. The supervisory team consists of Dr Paul Jones (Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology) and Dr John Sturzaker (Department of Geography and Planning).

#### Your participation:

If you agree to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form to declare that you understand what the research involves. Following this, you will be provided with a camera (if you do not have one available to you) and asked to take photographs of spaces in the city that are meaningful to you. In this task, it is important that you choose spaces that are important for your everyday life. Please do not take more than ten pictures. I will give you two weeks to perform this task. Once you are done with taking photos I will ask you to send them to me by email or regular mail. If it should be necessary to send documents via regular post, I will equip you with a stamped envelope. After this we will arrange a date and place for our interview. The interviews will cover different aspects related to your experience of the city and your participation in it. The photographs that you have previously taken will also be discussed in these interviews. The interviews will be recorded with a Dictaphone in order to be able to transcribe them. All information will be kept confidential and when the results are published you will be assigned a pseudonym.



Risk and contact:

There are no perceived risks or disadvantages involved in this study. However, it should be noted that part of the research is conducted in an urban environment outside the control of the researcher. If you experience any kind of discomfort or stress by the research please report this immediately to the researcher. If there are any problems please contact me ([m.potschulat@liv.ac.uk](mailto:m.potschulat@liv.ac.uk)) and I will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to me with, then you should contact the Research Governance Officer on 0151 794 8290 ([ethics@liv.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@liv.ac.uk)). When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make

Data protection:

All information collected will be kept confidential and only the researchers involved in this project will have access to it. Any computer files will be password protected and any hard data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The data collected may be cited in the final thesis and in future publications, however it will be anonymous and no quotations that would identify you will be used. Data will be stored for five years before it is destroyed. You will be informed of any publications and you will be free to access them and the final thesis if you wish.

If you agree to take part in this research as a participant taking part in a University of Liverpool ethically approved study you will be covered by their insurance.

I would like to reiterate that your participation is voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me via email ([m.potschulat@liv.ac.uk](mailto:m.potschulat@liv.ac.uk)).